



BOLD, NEW VISION FOR PRAIRIE CONSERVATION

By Andy Marshall



A coalition of conservation groups, including the Alberta Wilderness Association, will soon launch ambitious, new plans for restoring to its original condition and conserving for future generations parts of a massive prairie eco-region extending across two Canadian provinces and at least four U.S. states. It will affect an area bigger than France or about 247,000 square miles.

Called the Northern Plains Conservation Network, the coalition has set aggressive goals for at least one publicly-owned, wild bison herd to be roaming sections of a protected prairie region by 2004. That date is the bicentennial of early U.S. explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark first travelling across the northern Great Plains and seeing hundreds of thousands of the now virtually extinct majestic beasts.



Bison

C. Wershler



Lost River Mixed Grass

C. Wallis

"Imagine an endless vista with bison herds in the distance rumbling across the prairie . . . with swift fox, burrowing owls, hawks and eagles everywhere..."

The bison stands as an inspiring symbol for at least 34 imperilled wildlife species the coalition proposes to restore to healthy populations through its actions. Formally protecting about 18.5 per cent of this eco-region in an unbroken land mass has been targeted as critical for this purpose. The region in question, straddling the U.S. border and including southeast Alberta, southwest Saskatchewan, eastern Montana, western, northern and southern Dakota, eastern Wyoming and

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Pronghorn antelope

northwestern Nebraska, has been chosen because an estimated 60 per cent of it still has natural or semi-natural vegetation.

"Imagine an endless vista with bison herds in the distance rumbling across the prairie . . . with swift fox, burrowing owls, hawks and eagles everywhere," says an enthusiastic Jonathan Proctor, network co-ordinator, from his base in Boulder, Colorado. "Herds of pronghorn, elk herds, grizzlies, more wildlife than in the mountains even. This would be the Serengeti of North America," he adds, referring to the great east-central African plains which attract crowds from all over the world to see the wildlife and savour their sweeping beauty.

While the wildlife are likely the 'star' players to capture the public focus on this project, similar in scope and spirit to the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y to Y) initiative, the restoration of healthy fish populations in the plains' rivers and the maintenance of natural grasses and other flora will be a vital aspect of the network's mandate.

"Ours is a vision for the future of the heartland of North America, a vision of a sea of grass uncut by political boundaries," reads a written statement from the network. "The northern Great Plains contains perhaps the greatest hope for large-scale restoration of any North American eco-region."

AWA president Cliff Wallis, currently the only Canadian voice in the network, representing 22 local and national conservation groups, is excited about the project. Closely involved in the study of prairie grasslands for more than three decades, he sees great hope in reversing a long-held view that the value of the plains lies only in cultivating, taming or otherwise exploiting them for industrial purposes such as oil, gas and coal development.

Invoking the well-known words of comedian Rodney Dangerfield, he says the habitat and the species of the prairies

have been topics "that don't get no respect." But, as the public learns more about the project, he adds, they'll have the chance, for example, to appreciate "there's nothing better on the planet than the southeastern Alberta grasslands.

The largest of AWA's guided trips have been to the grasslands, Wallis notes. "We've seen respect go up a hundredfold." With growing awareness of the significance of the prairie animal, bird and plant species, "the next step is to get long-term, legal protection for them."

The network's target area in southeast Alberta is about 1,600 square miles. The only formally protected subregions there at present are the Milk River Natural Area and Ecological Reserve and the Suffield National Wildlife Area.

Aside from pushing their intrinsic natural values, Wallis and the network articulate a strong economic argument for setting aside large tracts through strategies ranging from outright purchase to conservation agreements on private and public land.

This argument points out that many rural areas, north and south of the border, are in serious economic trouble. If the only prospect for these places is more ranching and a continuation of the agriculture monoculture, "then you'll see further depopulation and economic decline.

"If you put forward a positive vision about this wonderful grassland landscape and ways people can enjoy it, then you will attract more people and get economic benefit from it," explains Wallis.

Both he and Proctor emphasize the network is not out to hurt the agricultural industry. "There are exaggerations and untruths, this idea there is a conspiracy to kick people off their land," says Proctor.

"We're trying to diversify the economy of the regions," he says. More visitors to an area and expanded ecotourism opportunities will boost local economies. Being able to greatly increase wild elk herds, or even allow bison hunting in some designated areas if the numbers are healthy enough, will offer further advantages as hunters flock to these places.

When the network is in a position to buy significant land holdings to further its aims, it will need vehicles, fencing and other supplies during the restoration work. "All this comes from the local economy," says Proctor.



Horseshoe Canyon



Prairie Coulees

This Wild Lands Advocate story is the first opportunity for Canadians to read about the Northern Plains Conservation Network. It is not surprising, then, that few local groups know about its plans.

The Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF), formed in the late 1980s to conserve and safeguard Alberta's prairie and parkland eco-systems and comprising a broad spectrum of membership including agriculture, academia, industry, conservation groups and government, has not yet been contacted by the network, although that is on Proctor's agenda.

While both sides welcome a discussion, philosophical differences are already apparent.

"We know what the challenges are in terms of preserving bio-diversity," says the forum's full-time secretary, Ian Dyson, based in Lethbridge. Population growth, subdivision of land for more housing, economic development, landscape change and fragmentation from industrial activities, are chief among them.

The forum's mandate is to document and be aware of the species that now exist in these regions and "ensure our management practices are discharged in such a manner that we allow those things to continue as healthy, viable populations."

But, "the business of assembling land, putting land in banks or protecting land with strong legislation is a red herring," says Dyson. "We take a nuanced approach to the goal of preserving bio-diversity." That means a "balanced" strategy that will limit the human impact but take into account the existing uses, from ranching and farming to oil and gas exploration.

"The key thing is to exercise some discipline with regard to the human impact on landscape and better understand how our management practices can be deployed to achieve our (economic) objectives without having unintended side-effects on bio-diversity," he adds.

"Protected areas are only one small part of that equation," Dyson says. If, for example, the Alberta government decided to designate three times the land it protected under the Special Places program (and the government insists it has no such intention), "we would still have only a fraction of the total land base." The grassland natural region of Alberta comprises about 37,000 square miles.

Dyson notes that the idea of free-ranging bison doesn't seem feasible under current conditions in Alberta, a view echoed by



Milk River

Cheryl Bradley, an AWA representative on the Prairie Conservation Forum.

"We would have to change our perspective on land tenure and grazing management," she says. Bradley believes, though, that the goals of Special Places have not yet been achieved in any of the prairie's natural regions. Maintaining the grasslands are vital priorities.

Most ranchers are active and positive stewards of the natural grasslands and shouldn't be expected to do more without additional financial support, she says. The biggest challenge is the fragmentation resulting from residential development and the creation of large, acreage lawns, the network of rural roads to service them and the proliferation of what singer Ian Tyson calls the equine slums, which lead to overgrazing and the destruction of native grasses. Some "creative thinking" will be required to integrate public and private interests for the grasslands, says Bradley.

Proctor and the network, however, are convinced the only way to achieve their goals is through clear protection of publicly-owned land and acquiring privately-owned land.

"Merely improving land management, while that's an important goal, is not going to bring wild bison herds back. The typical landowner is not going to allow wild bison on their land," he says.

And, the push for bringing back the bison is based on the contention that if the project is of such a scale to accommodate healthy and migrating populations of them, then there'll be enough land for all other species that have suffered declines in the past 200 years. The object is to build and maintain a series of protected reserves and connecting wildlife movement corridors. Existing national, state and provincial parks and wilderness areas will anchor the system, with the creation of new protected areas coming via private sector initiatives and the conservation and restoration of critical segments of eco-systems, the network explains.

"I just don't see maintaining the system as it is as a way of truly restoring all the species and processes that once thrived," says Proctor. "We're not willing to throw in the hat and say it can't be done. Our role is to restore intact eco-systems."

Because the network's vision is so far-reaching, "people are going to jump behind it and raise money to be able to do it."



Sharp-tailed grouse

While the network's immediate goals are to identify better what lands may be available, actual purchases are a long way down the road. Its budget is still minimal, with affiliated groups paying their own way to attend meetings, for example.

In the current U.S. political climate, it is unlikely, says Proctor, that the federal government will help buy private land. The network is more optimistic about what will come from private sources. The Nature Conservancy, in Canada and the U.S., with its expertise in dealing with private landowners who want to dedicate their property to conservation, has been invited to the network's next meeting. The Conservancy has already identified areas it believes must be saved.

Proctor points to a recent decision by the U.S. Congress to pay \$100 million for ecologically significant land in New Mexico. "If we got Congress to spend \$100 million in Montana, we could buy an incredible amount of land."



Little Bighorn

© Donna Jo Massie



C. Wershtler

Suffield

Wallis says the project will initially need strong co-operation from local people where lands are to be assembled. For longer-term protection, governments will need to buy into the vision. Having agreed on the principle of respect for the cultural aspirations of indigenous peoples, the network is also pursuing the involvement of Aboriginal groups in the plans.

The main impediment, Wallis says, will be "the narrowness of the human mind." ❧

Areas of Concern in Alberta's Grasslands

All of these areas are homes to numerous species, many of which are vulnerable and endangered.

(ESA = Environmentally Significant Area)

Milk River - Sage Creek - Cypress Hills: mostly native prairie with nationally significant ESAs. Has a range of habitat from mixed grassland, wetlands, badlands and riparian habitats, key habitat, massive sandstone outcrops, sand dunes, springs, and the unglaciated plateau of the Cypress Hills. Many vulnerable species live her, including swift fox, pronghorn antelope, Burrowing owl, snakes and many species of birds.

Milk River Ridge: The unglaciated plateau of the Milk River Ridge, south of the Milk River consists largely of native prairie and has a highly significant endemic prairie insect fauna.

Middle Sand Hills: a provincially significant area with diverse sand plain, ephemeral wetlands and dunes

Majorville: on the bow river, the majority remains as native mixed grassland on hummocky moraine with wetlands, coulees, and badlands.

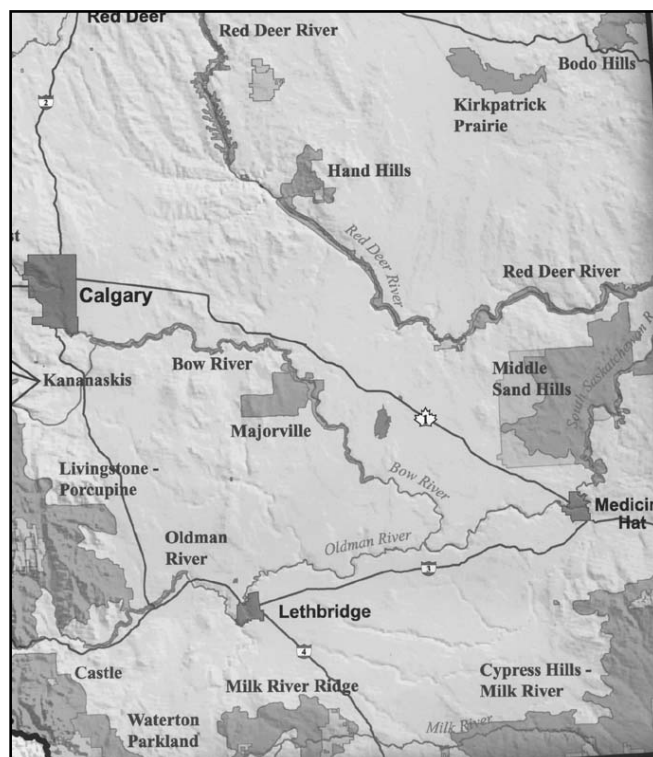
Hand Hills: an extensive area of lush fescue and largely native grassland.

Kirkpatrick Prairie: over half of this area remains as native prairie, with dunes, a productive creek valley, grassland and parkland, and contains the nationally significant Kirkpatrick Lake Bird Sanctuary

Lower Red Deer River: extensive river valley habitats with open water, cutbanks, riparian areas, cottonwood stands, alkali wetlands and springs, grasslands, sand dunes, sagebrush and alkali flats, massive river terraces, coulee woodlands.

Bodo Hills: more than half remains as native prairie, transition zone between parkland and Northern fescue subregion, lush fescue grassland, mixed grassland and aspen woodland on rolling hummocky moraine, with typical knob and kettle topography, major ice thrust ridges, and alkali springs.

Rumsey South: an internationally significant ESA with aspen woodland, lush fescue grassland, wetlands, classic moraine plateaux and eskers. ❧



MORE THOUGHTS ON "FLEXIBILITY TO MANAGE"

By Dr. Brian L. Horejsi



In the last issue of Wild Lands Advocate I wrote about historical and entrenched resistance by industry and government bureaucracies to measures to make those two parties accountable to the public. What characterizes parliamentary democracies (those who can spot an oxymoron can see this one a mile away) is a

conspicuous absence of standards and

thresholds, in our regulations and legislation, to prevent environmental, social and economic exploitation of public assets, including public lands and tax dollars. If you're inclined to lump policy in with regulation and legislation, as governments and industry routinely do, I suggest you don't do so.

Even hard core right wing conservatives like Alberta premier Ralph Klein and Finance Minister Pat Nelson occasionally shed their emperors trappings when talking about the true meaning of policy. Just recently they let it slip that "laws", as opposed to government policy, are needed to shield Alberta's Heritage Savings Trust Fund from, I presume, corporate and political grabsters. "I think you have to have a legislative framework", Nelson proffered. It was not reported whether she later had to have surgical removal of that phrase from her ideological memory. In any event, the hypocrisy that spews daily from government about regulation in the public interest cannot be trumped by virtually any group, although special commercial interests try hard.

There are no surprises in these contortions and contradictions emanating from government and industry. However, what I find at least occasionally surprising, and almost always disappointing, is the lack of focus and attention by environmental activists and citizens on the absence of effective laws and regulations and on a process to have such laws and regulations established. Why is that?

Part of it is that few activists, and few citizens, are scientists or lawyers, and they rarely interact with government except to pay taxes or as users of dispensing services (i.e., permits, licenses). Even this contact is in jeopardy as governments and industry collaborate to privatize services; another means of distancing both parties from accountability. Isn't it always the other guys call?

On the industry and government side of the regulatory field are huge batteries of lawyers, and some scientists, almost all of whom are working to keep "flexibility to manage" in place. It's really quite a strange activity for lawyers and scientists; working desperately behind the scenes, or at National Energy Board Hearings, or surface access hearings, to prevent the establishment of laws or the use of regulations. "No laws" equate to "flexibility

to manage" which grants immense discretionary powers to government and to traditional users of public land and assets.

What an environmentally, socially and economically twisted nation we have become; more lawyers fighting against the rule of law than enforcing laws! In the U.S., on the other hand, the vast

Protecting "flexibility to manage" in order to make a deal with government or industry outside the public realm is still flexibility. It never has been and never will be in the public interest.



The Towers (Mt. Assiniboine)
© Donna Jo Massie

majority of lawyers are engaged in arguing the merits of an issue within the law. While the U.S. is a country that has a large contingent of legal lobbyists who are aggressively attempting to undermine existing legislation that protects the public interest, like the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, the public and it's legal representatives are just as busy using legislation to protect themselves from bullying governments and destructive industry.


The sorry state of regulatory incompetence in Canada, Alberta and British Columbia, while "managed" by government and industry, is partly a product of public ignorance and indifference. You have to be aware of something before you know if it's being damaged or lost, and "value" in and of public lands and public processes is not easily built.

Part of our weakness relates to flexibility to manage. When the target is always moving, as in the status of an ecosystem, or the viability of a wildlife population, or cumulative impacts on a landscape, and decisions about these values are constantly being made without reference to standards for their protection, "flexibility to manage" erodes value because it never allows for a consistent definition to evolve.

It's a vicious circle that requires a clear vision and serious determination to break free of. Designating a landscape (like the Bighorn Wildland) as wilderness, or roadless habitat (Prime Protection Zone, as a meager example) or core security habitat, or establishing a road density threshold, are means of defining a value that can "suddenly" be identified and that presents substantial resistance to bureaucratic and industry flexibility.

If society can't begin to "squeeze" some of the life out of flexibility by at least beginning to establish standards and thresholds, a task which will not be easy, as those who have recently been involved with the crippled Species At Risk Act (SARA) can attest to, then the public and it's interests will continue to be abused.



While the flexibility-to-manage position of government and industry remains a major obstacle to environmental and democratic justice, part of the challenge will be to overcome the propensity of some major environmental and social organizations to undermine the ranks of those who think processes must be public and legislated. Protecting "flexibility to manage" in order to make a deal with government or industry outside the public realm is still flexibility. It never has been and never will be in the public interest. 



Commonwealth Peak

© Donna Jo Massie

AWA WILDERNESS DEFINITION

Wilderness

Wilderness exists where large areas are characterized by the dominance of natural processes, the presence of the full complement of plant and animal communities characteristic of the region, and the absence of human constraints on nature.

Values of Wilderness

Intrinsic Value - Wilderness, including all life and natural processes, has its own inherent value that is independent of its usefulness to humans.

Social Value - Wilderness areas provide recreation opportunities, solitude, and a refuge from the stress and noise of everyday life. The scenic beauty enhances the enjoyment of outdoor recreation. Wilderness areas are valued for science, education, and are sometimes associated with meditation, spiritual renewal and personal growth.

Biophysical Value - Wilderness provides essential biological services such as air and water purification and waste disposal, habitat for plant and animal species, and allows the maintenance of biodiversity and key ecological and evolutionary processes.

Characteristics of Wilderness


Ecological Integrity is the capability of an ecosystem to maintain natural processes and the diversity of native species over time.

Biodiversity is the variety of life, and includes genetic diversity, species diversity, and community/ecosystem diversity. Biodiversity is both spatially and temporally variable and depends on biogeographic and evolutionary context. In true wilderness, species distribution and abundance should be consistent with natural patterns characteristic of the region.

Naturalness refers to the absence of human disturbance. Many human activities are incompatible with wilderness and can diminish its essential qualities.

Large, undisturbed areas are required to provide for the long-term maintenance of wilderness. Small, isolated areas cannot support viable ecosystems, species and genetic diversity, or landscape-scale natural disturbances.

Restoration of Wilderness

For practical purposes, the definition of wilderness must be broadened as a consequence of the degree of human modification of most landscapes in Alberta. As a last resort, when land-use planning has failed and pristine wilderness does not exist, consideration must be given to areas with the potential for restoration to wilderness state, and those that maintain some, but not all, characteristics of wilderness. For example, small patches of unmodified landscape may not be large enough to qualify as wilderness; however, within a highly modified landscape, these areas may be the last natural areas available, and may provide many of the values associated with wilderness. 

FIRST-EVER AWA PRESIDENT ENJOYED VARIED REPERTOIRE

By Andy Marshall

Curmudgeonly and kind, Floyd Stromstedt clearly marches to his own drumbeat. "Yeah, you could call me 'ornery," he says in a rich baritone voice from his Berwyn home in Alberta's Peace River country. "I don't follow the crowd, I know that."



The first-ever elected president of the Alberta Wilderness Association, serving from 1969-1972, Stromstedt has enjoyed a remarkably varied life, from farm boy to oilfield technologist, pilot to opera singer.

"I guess I've done a lot of things," comes the understated response from the 63-year-old man. He's relaxing in his den, surrounded by two mounted

bears, a moose, a wolf, antelope, mule deer, hawks, owls and other creatures he has hunted or found in his unending travels across the province. He still drives the few kilometres to Grimshaw each day to run the seed cleaning plant there. Three single-engine aircraft, in varying need of restoration work, occupy the hangars at the quarter section he lives on with his wife, Karen, whom he married almost 30 years ago. They have a 27-year-old daughter, Carla. He has a son, Cameron, from an earlier marriage.

Sharing the 1948 Cessna 170 with a partner, "I fly every chance I get," says Stromstedt. His thirst for adventure and the outdoor life must be in the genes. His father, John, who recently died at 91, emigrated as a young man from Sweden to farm in the



Peace region, and, after various twists and turns, settled with his wife on the land Stromstedt occupies today.

Young Floyd grew up learning all aspects of farming. In 1957, at age 18, he came to Calgary to take welding and diesel mechanics programs at what today is the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. Somehow, during those early years, he also spent time at the Banff School of Fine Arts and took singing lessons in the city. In fact, he won the junior operatic class at the Kiwanis Music Festival shortly before his 20th birthday and later took part in Calgary Opera Society productions.

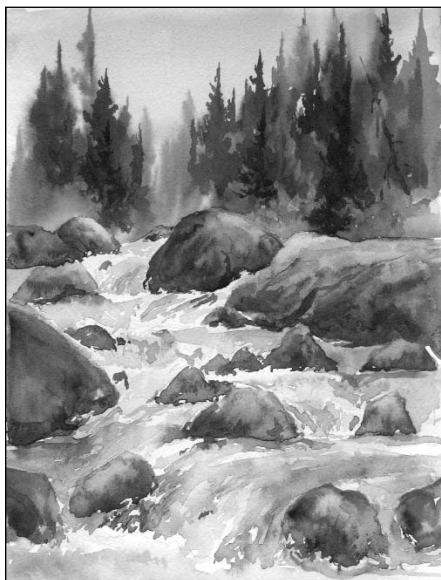
In the next decade and a half, he turned his hand to careers as a camp cook with a geological survey in the then Northwest Territories, a service station operator on 16th Avenue N.W., a trencher with Standard Gravel, a battery operator in southern Saskatchewan oilfields, an engineering technologist in Calgary's downtown, and helping build basements with a cribbing company. For one fascinating year, he even managed a 20,000-acre ranch near Hanna, Alberta.

In the mid-1970s, after buying a quarter section near his parents' Berwyn property, he and Karen moved back north. They lived there for 17 years, before taking over the family place when the parents had retired to a seniors' home. Apart from his mixed farming activities, Stromstedt hauled grain, built basements and was a delivery driver for the local equipment dealer. He started with the seed cleaning plant 10 years ago.

He also continued his amateur singing activities, becoming a regular performer with the Peace Players. He's still asked to sing at weddings and funerals. At a recent seniors' home official opening, he performed Bless This House.

"I've never been a career man," he says. But, his physical stature -- five feet nine inches, almost 200 pounds -- gave him a capacity for sustained, hard work. "I just got a job and paid my bills as best I could." He admits, though, to a phobia about money. "I'm not too keen about material things, other than my planes and my rifles."

It was his frustrations as a sheep hunter thwarted in his forays into the Foothills by the growing encroachment of industrialization that brought him together with people like Bill Michalsky and Steve Dixon (highlighted in the December, 2001, Wild Lands Advocate) to officially launch the AWA.



Mountain Stream

© Donna Jo Massie

But, his intentions from the beginning were to attract as wide a range of people as possible to the fledgling organization. "About 900 individuals feel strongly enough to become members of this group," he explains in an April, 1971, letter. "Of these 900 souls we find: some who love horses, some who hate horses; some who hunt, some who hate hunters; some who fish, some who do not fish; some who

backpack, some who prefer day hikes; some who paint pictures, some who take photographs; some lone wolves, some with five children; some church leaders, some Girl Guides; some ranchers, some urbanites; and on and on, ad infinitum."

The vision then, as it is today, was the protection of the diminishing wilderness. "Protect this wilderness in whatever way necessary, but SAVE it!" Stromstedt exhorts in that 1971 letter.

A 1970 missive to then Alberta premier Harry Strom further confirms Stromstedt's commitment to the cause. It resonates well today.

"Alberta's forested areas are a complete checkerboard of seismic lines, liberally interspersed with roads, railways, landing strips, power dams, etc.

This is painfully obvious from the air," he writes. "The greatest mistake in Canadian history was made that day in 1930 when the provincial governments were granted jurisdiction over natural resource development. There is too great an incentive for current selfishness; to 'ride the boom'."

He shared that passion in classrooms and meeting halls across the province. He recalls clearly the clashes with Social Credit government leaders of the day. He became a lightning rod for many of the other disaffected conservationists dismayed by the proliferation of timber, coal, gas, oil and grazing leases in the wilderness.

However, the cost of attending conferences all over the country became a burden, and his position as AWA president was hardly eased by the fact that he was working for a major energy company at the time.

In 1972 he wrote what he now acknowledges may have been a melodramatic letter announcing his resignation. The position possibly cost him his marriage, a car (involved in a crash while he was trying to get a report completed) and a job. "I was just burned out," he says simply. He has not been involved since in the organization.

"I'm proud to have been associated with it," he says. "I didn't have the wherewithal to carry on the fight."

Circumstances since, particularly increasing overpopulation, have made him even more pessimistic about the world's future. But, he respects AWA for maintaining its push for conservation. "You have to keep flailing away," he says.

Never a man who particularly liked large crowds, Stromstedt remarks that his best hunts may have occurred when he was alone. He can't throw a 45-gallon drum of gas into the back of the truck like he used to, but he still likes to remain active.

And, he speaks easily about the epigraph that could be placed on his headstone when he dies: He was a good baritone; he was a good pilot; he was a good rifle shot; and he could light a fire with one match. "You can use that in your story," he says.



A STUDY IN CONTRASTS: THE EUB HEARINGS ON THE PROPOSED FORT HILLS OIL SANDS PROJECT

By Dr. Richard G. Thomas



July 1, 2002

It's Canada Day and I'm driving from Edmonton to Fort McMurray. A few days previously, Christyann Olson [AWA Executive Director] asked if I would represent AWA at the upcoming Energy and Utilities Board (EUB) Hearings concerning TrueNorth Energy's (TNE) application to proceed with its proposed \$3.5 billion oil

sands mining development known as the Fort Hills project to be located some 90 km northeast of Fort McMurray.

Despite my whining about lack of time, unfinished projects, etc., my arm is readily twistable on this occasion primarily because the fate of one of Alberta's natural heritage jewels - the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC) - is hanging in the balance. As conceived, TNE's open pit mining operations would destroy half of MLWC's peatlands, including at least 45% of its supremely spectacular patterned fen. In my 1998 report for Alberta Environmental Protection on the province's Boreal Forest Natural Region I wrote that the MLWC was "worthy of a strenuous protection effort". It's time for me to "walk my talk".

What follows is a rough day-by-day narrative and a highly personal view that tracks what I considered to be the highlights and low points of the Hearings as they unfolded.

DAY 1: Tuesday, July 2:

On the first morning, the ballroom is packed - 200 people is the unofficial attendance estimate. I feel awash in a sea of suits, which makes me nervous since I'm allergic to suits and ties.

Facing the audience are the three men representing the EUB: Mr. Tom McFee (former Mayor of Drayton Valley), Mr. John Nichol and, chairing the proceedings, Mr. Neil McCrank - who is also the Chairman of the EUB. During the course of these Hearings McCrank does 90-95% of the talking for the Board and basically runs the show.

To the Board's right are at least half-a-dozen Board staff, sundry observers, and Ms. June Gossen - the "court reporter" whose skill and stamina will prove to be awe-inspiring. To their left is TNE's panel. TNE has roughly 25-30 employees and consultants on hand throughout the Hearings. Anyone making a presentation before the Board constitutes a "Panel" and is required to be sworn in prior to giving their testimony. The proceedings are formal and highly structured. For neophytes like myself (and I hear many other people make this observation) the overall atmosphere is quite intimidating.

The similarity to a court of law is enhanced by the presence of various lawyers acting on behalf of TNE, the Federal and Provincial governments, and several other groups. Numerous exhibits (almost 70 by Hearings' end) will also be formally introduced as evidence. TNE is represented by Mr. Dennis (Denny) Thomas Q.C. who specializes in appearing for the "dark side of the force" at hearings concerning environmentally

contentious development projects. His previous clients include Alberta-Pacific (Al-Pac) and Cardinal River Coals (remember the Cheviot Mine).

Ms. Karin Buss, of the firm Ackroyd, Piasta, Roth and Day, who is appearing (pro bono) on behalf of the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition (OSEC), the Fort McMurray Medical Staff Association and the Canadian Federation of University Women, will be Mr. Thomas's main protagonist. All lawyers and other interveners have the right to cross-examine each panel, and it is during the interrogation sessions that the Hearings' most interesting exchanges are destined to take place.

Having decided upon the interveners' "batting order" (which we will run through about four times) and ruled against a motion to delay the Hearings for a day, the Board is ready to hear TNE's application. TNE's panel, which initially consists of 14 members, all of whom (based on their CVs) are acknowledged as "experts" by the Board, are introduced at length by Denny Thomas. Their ranks include Ms. Linda Halsey (University of Alberta) and bryologist Dr. Dale Vitt (formerly of the U of A), two of the authors of a study (Halsey et al., 2001) that has played a pivotal role in some of the tawdry events leading up to these Hearings. D. Thomas also reads out a list of letters TNE has received in support of its proposed project, all of which are entered into the record as exhibits.

TNE's CEO, Mr. David Park, presents the bulk of the company's submission. He and other TNE employees read from typescripts that have been made available to the audience. The air becomes heavy with platitudes and technospeak that, to my ears at least, are frequently divorced from environmental realities. This is especially true of a time-lapse video we get to watch which shows the [proposed] mining of half the MLWC peatland and its subsequent (theoretical) reclamation.

For me, Park's most critical statements come during his summation. First, TNE regards the oil sands deposits underlying their leases, in general, and McClelland fen in particular, as "unique" and second, considers the McClelland Lake patterned fen as "representative rather than unique". Both assumptions are



McClelland Lake Wetland Complex

R. G. Thomas



patently false, with the latter being based solely upon Halsey et.al.'s (2001) paper.

As my mind begins to wander it occurs to me that these Hearings represent a study in contrasts. For example, 8 days ago I was privileged to accompany a plant ecologist friend and guide/outfitter Charles (Chuck) Beauchamp on an early morning flight (from Fort McMurray) over the MLWC and photograph its remarkable patterned fen (plus various oil sands developments in the area). Later the same morning, Chuck drove us to the western margin of the MLWC and we then walked into the fen. Even at current low water levels, I resembled a mammoth in the La Brea tar pits as I sloshed my way through the flarks that are separated by narrow treed (Black spruce and Tamarack) ridges known as strings. Within 5 minutes we had found 5 species of insectivorous plants, some rare in the province but abundant in the fen. The fen lies at the centre of the whooping crane's migration route. I pick out the calls of Black terns, Common snipe, Lesser yellowlegs, Franklin's and Bonapartes gulls, Red-winged blackbirds, Olive-sided flycatcher.....Now I'm stuck in a crowded, stuffy windowless room listening to technocrats discussing the fate of that marvelous wild place.

Apparently TNE, which at present has 150 employees, spent \$150 million to get to this point and has been preparing for these Hearings for the last 3 or 4 months. I can't help contrasting all the resources the company has brought to bear with what AWA will be throwing at them, namely moi. It's definitely a David vs. Goliath contest.

On behalf of her diverse clientele, Karin Buss is the first to cross-examine the TNE panel. Her questions span the gamut from the project's water needs to mine tailings disposal, the collision rates on Highway 63, acidifying emissions and everything in between. It is fascinating to learn TNE offered to fund a Fort McMurray Medical Staff Association study of the community's health requirements, but that provision of this funding was conditional on the Association not coming to the Hearings! TNE, like big industry everywhere, tends to throw money and promises at potential problems. This tactic has proven successful, enabling TNE to sign letters of agreement with three First Nations (Mikisew Cree; Athabasca-Chipewyan; and Fort McKay) which then withdrew from participating in these Hearings.

Many of Buss's sharpest-edged questions were directed at Linda Halsey, whose study (Halsey et. al., 2001) proved crucial in paving the way for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) to amend the Fort McMurray - Athabasca oil Sands Subregional Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) - as per TNE's request. This is the now-infamous study that purports to show the McClelland Lake fen is merely "representative" rather than unique. As an offshoot of this work, TNE also suggested that the Thickwood Hills fen was an adequate (ecologically equivalent) substitute for the McClelland Fen, whose protection would counterbalance the loss (to mining) of the latter. This is yet another transparently false assertion - a blatant attempt to equate apples with oranges. It is noteworthy that a subsequent peatland research proposal submitted to TNE in December 2001 by Linda

Halsey is to be funded by the company (agreement signed on April 5, 2002) to the tune of \$1 million. This grant is registered in the name of Dr. Kevin DeVito a the U. of A.

Prompted by Buss, Halsey agreed that her assessment of the significance of the McClelland patterned fen did not involved any evaluation of its biodiversity, or of the conservation value of the MLWC as a whole. Asked if her initial research for TNE was designed to provide evidence to refute the IRP, Halsey replied that the proposed IRP amendment was a contentious issue and that she wanted to "present evidence to put MLWC in perspective". She further stated: "I'm a scientist and I provide information."

DAY 2: Wednesday, July 3

The day starts with more questions from Buss that include a batch for both Halsey and Dr. Dale Vitt. Originally, Vitt was assisting the Fort McKay Band and Buss has a March 7, 2002 letter by him regarding MLWC that states: "I see little chance that the system will return (post-mining) to its present condition."

Vitt says that since TNE constituted its much-vaunted MLW "Sustainability Committee" to maintain water flows/levels and chemistry within natural ranges, his previous concerns have been allayed. According to TNE's plans, dewatering of the McClelland Lake basin would commence in 2011 and mining would start in 2013.

Mid way through the morning session, Buss drops a bombshell that wakes everyone up: in 2000, Koch Industries (TNE's parent company) was fined \$35 million for environmental infractions - the

largest civil fine under Federal law in US history (according to the US Environmental Protection Agency's website). Denny Thomas is on his feet immediately to argue that what happened in the USA is "completely disconnected" from TNE's application before the EUB. Of course, he, like everyone else in the room, knows that Buss's line of enquiry is highly relevant, and the Board so rules. This debate prompts Mr. Michael Bruni, the Board's chief counsel, to ask TNE to provide a schematic of its corporate structure. It turns out that Americans comprise one-third of TNE's board of directors and that the chairman of Flint Hills Resources, Dave Robertson, is also the chairman of TrueNorth.

Diana Horton (whose PhD in Botany is from U of A) feels so strongly that MLWC deserves protection that she has driven from Iowa to participate in these Hearings. The main target of her inquiries is Halsey and the size, source and timing of her research monies - especially those from TNE. Horton is also extremely critical of the methodology used by Halsey et.al. (2001) and is relentless in her pursuit of answers.

When, finally, it's my turn to ask some questions, Denny Thomas wants to know how long I'll be and what I'll be asking questions about. He says AWA "is a sophisticated group" and that TNE only heard of our intervention yesterday. I tell the Board I'm not often accused of being sophisticated, and estimate my questions will occupy about 20 minutes. I focus my questions around the timing of TNE's realization that the IRP (and its



McClelland fen reticulate pattern

R.G. Thomas



restrictions) was in place; if they considered the IRP a problem; and what communications took place between Alberta Environment (AENV), SRD and the Department of Energy.

David Park states that in 1998, when TNE acquired the old Solvex leases, they were unaware of the IRP and that its existence came as a "surprise". Interestingly, Solvex's plans did not involve mining within the MLWC. TNE also originally planned a single "train" mine but, following a drilling programme in the winter of 1999 that proved the existence of substantial oil sands deposits under McClelland fen, started to design a far larger project. With respect to TNE's request for an IRP amendment, Park said he was confident of the merit of their case, which involved "a unique resource" vs. "a representative wetland". He made it clear that the only reason TNE wants to mine in the fen is that it is "more economic" (i.e., more profitable) to do so. This, of course, is regarded as an admirable motive in KleinCo.'s Alberta, where the official provincial religion is greed.

A key aspect of the McClelland Lake fen's significance and uniqueness is the complexity of its patterning. I asked Halsey (TNE's "peatlands expert") about the hydrological significance of McClelland's complicated reticulate pattern. Basically the more complex its pattern, the more complex is the fen's water flow system. She told me she could not answer my question because she was not a hydrologist.

TrueNorth's panel knew of no Boreal patterned fens with a complexity equivalent to that of McClelland's that had been subject to the levels of damage and degradation planned for the MLWC and then reclaimed. In other words, there are no scientific "controls" out there and MLWC will be the guinea pig subjected to their destructive experiments.

My brief stint was followed by the mammoth effort of Mr. John Malcolm, the interim chief of the nascent Wood Buffalo First Nation. His range of questions was even broader than that of Karin Buss and, every now and then he posed a "zinger" that made everyone sit up. At one point a somewhat exasperated Neil McCrank told Malcolm he had been asking questions for a total of four hours!

DAY 3: Thursday, July 4:

Today commenced with cross-examinations by representatives from the Federal government and Alberta Environment, followed by Michael Bruni and Andrea Larsen of the EUB staff. Bruni endeavoured to unravel TNE's corporate structure and determine its "financial wellness". Larsen (an engineer) asked numerous technical questions (most of which were over my head) about TNE's planned mining and processing operations.

TNE staff reiterated their faith that the company's proposed reclamation scheme would prove successful, although, significantly, they did finally admit "we aren't entirely sure of what the final landscape is going to look like" and that the greatest uncertainties involve "wetland areas". In oil sands-speak

the end-product of mine reclamation is termed "the closure landscape".

Responding to Larsen's questions regarding MLWC and McClelland fen, Vitt gave a glowing, upbeat account of how Canada has the world's leading experts in peatland reclamation. His basic, ultra-optimistic message was: trust us, we have the technology, we know what we're doing. All this despite the fact that his key example was a non-Boreal, non-patterned, coastal fen in Holland, and that peatlands "reclaimed" thus far have been stripped of their surficial peat deposits, not obliterated by an open-pit oil sands mine.

When the Board's turn to ask questions arrived, John Nichol got very exercised over TNE's plan to dispose of high salinity waste water by injecting it into an aquifer that complies with the EUB's definition of a usable water zone. This issue was to generate considerable discussion and argument throughout the remainder of the Hearings. Nichol stated that the Board had never approved such a practice.

The day's events closed with a surreal exchange between Neil McCrank and David Park that revealed the Board's true

colours. McCrank, noting the EUB's "conservation mandate", wanted to know "how much of the resource would be left in the ground" along lease boundaries and "how will we explain this to our grandchildren?" Park, who has 3 children under the age of four, said he did not want to have to explain to them "how we wasted the resource". I should note here that the Alberta Energy Department uses the Orwellian term "sterilizing the land" to describe anything - such as the establishment of a protected area - that results in any part of the oil

sands being placed off-limits to mining. There then followed considerable discussion between TNE and the Board regarding "resource sterilization". Such terminology is doubly Orwellian when one remembers that that oil sands technology (heat, solvents, steam) actually DOES sterilize the land.

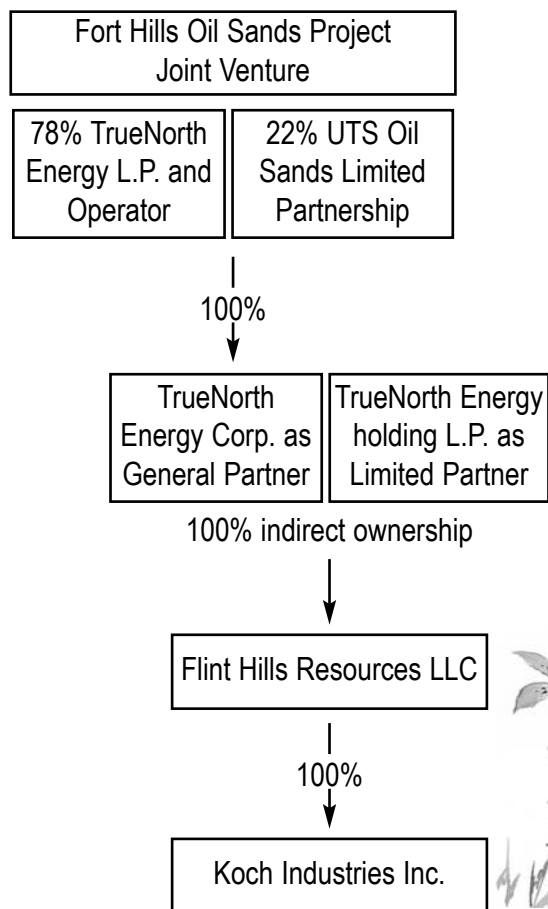
DAY 4: Friday, July 5:

The proceedings began with the panel - consisting of anthropologist Ms. Lorraine Hoffman Mercredi and psychologist Mr. Phillip Coutu - representing the Creeburn Lake (important Aboriginal archaeological site) Preservation Society. As did John Malcolm previously, they provided many insights into Aboriginal politics in NE Alberta. They characterized TNE's "Traditional Land Use Study" as "very inaccurate", and noted that "people who speak against the land get paid and the people who speak for the land are marginalized." That truism certainly struck a chord with me.

Next up was the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition panel and all of their speakers did a fine job. From my perspective, both Gail Macrimmon's (Pembina Institute) and Myles Kitigawa's (Toxics Watch) presentation were articulate and right on the mark. Macrimmon pointed out that the billion barrels of oil (represented by the bitumen deposits underlying McClelland fen) described by TNE as a "unique resource", represents a mere



Synchrude oil sands



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0.33% of Alberta's total oil sands-related reserves. Dan Vialovich made the point that oil sands companies like TNE should be using the best available technologies (e.g. for controlling pollution) rather than the cheaper "best in class" options they are so proudly touting.

Dr. Diana Horton gave an excellent, heartfelt presentation. Comparing the almost complete loss of Iowa's original, natural habitats to what was in store for Alberta, she commented that Iowa's environment had been devastated by agriculture. This prompted the Board member Tom McGee to comment that Iowa's farms had "fed a lot of people", which reinforced my conviction that, in my presentation, I had better start from basics and explain why we need to conserve natural biodiversity if we wish to survive.

DAY 5: Tuesday, July 9:

Last Friday I agreed to be bumped further down the order of presenters so that one of Karin Buss's clients, the Fort McMurray Medical Staff Association (which represents all the town's physicians) can go first. With impressive sincerity and intelligence the three doctors explain the immense strains that medical services and practitioners in the Fort McMurray area are currently enduring. They argue that without greatly increased resources, approval of TNE's project will place an additional, untenable burden on a system already operating under severe duress. Dr. Sauvé, the Association's president, remarks that "sometimes we have to legislate common sense."

Next up are Robin Robinson and Esther Oakes from the Alberta Council of the Canadian Federation of University Women. The two share the reading of a very eloquent text that

presents arguments for the protection of MLWC. They even employ a quote from Ralph Klein, which unfortunately given the sad state of the province's environment, has a rather hollow ring to it, namely: "a prosperous province can afford to preserve its natural landscapes and is the richer for it."

As per usual, Denny Thomas establishes that the two are neither botanists or hydrologists and then spends a lot of time trying to convince them to agree that Dr. Vitt can be relied upon, they can trust TNE and AENV to make sure the fen will be reclaimed, and that more peatland research (by Halsey et.al.) would be the best thing since sliced bread. The "but we're doing research on the problem" mantra is another patented industry and government device for pacifying a public concerned about runaway environmental degradation.

Finally, before the lunch-break, it's my/AWA's turn. Starting from first principles, I try to explain why the protection of naturally-functioning ecosystems, and the biodiversity comprising them, is so vital. I use a quote from famous Stanford University ecologist Paul Ehrlich: "If we don't maintain the ecological system, there won't be any economic system - there won't be any businessmen, and there won't be any economists." In addition, I make reference to the important book "Nature's Services: Societal Dependence on Natural Ecosystems" (edited by Gretchen C. Daily, 1997) to introduce the concept of ecosystem services.

Using illustrations from my 1998 Boreal Forest Natural Region report, I explain how Alberta's Boreal forests are under siege from industrial development, and demonstrate the unprecedented pace and scale of the latter. I also list the many significant components of the MLWC (e.g. the Lake, the patterned value, its 12 sinkhole lakes, rare plants, bird life, etc.) that merit protection and emphasize that the complex as a whole is unique within the province.

One of the problems faced by environmentalists trying to mobilize public support for Boreal Forest conservation is that the Boreal is generally not perceived to be as scenically attractive or aesthetically pleasing as, for example, the Rockies or west coast temperate rainforest. I assure the Board that this will not be a concern in the case of the McClelland patterned fen, which, by any standards, is a beautiful, visually spectacular landform.

Like Horton, I attack the conclusions of Halsey et. al. (2001) which are based purely on a simplistic comparative morphometric analysis of the McClelland Lake fen. To do so, I use a crude ornithological analogy as follows. If I applied their approach to birds, I could say Whooping cranes, American white pelicans, and Snow geese are all large white birds with black wingtips that utilize aquatic habitats. There are lots of pelicans and geese, therefore, Whooping cranes aren't unique and do not require special protection status.

With respect to TNE's claim that mining half the McClelland peatland and fen will not degrade the rest of the complex (thanks to the Sustainability Committee's future stalwart endeavors), I argue this is pure wishful thinking and cite the line from a Dire Straits song: "De-Nile ain't just de river in Egypt". This draws considerable laughter from Board staff and other audience members. I ask the Board if half of Mt. Rundle (one of Canada's most photogenic and photographed mountains) was mined and replaced with grey-painted fiberglass, would it retain the same value to people as the original?

Searching for evidence of the oil sands reclamation successes referred to by TNE, I note that the only forest close to

being certified as "reclaimed", contains 30-40% Siberian Larch, a non-native species, and will have to be cut down. Furthermore, Syncrude's much praised flagship reclamation project, where Wood bison graze on an artificial pasture ("Marvel at magnificent creatures in their natural habitat" says their advertisement), may represent a public relations coup, but it also constitutes a stunning example of ecological illiteracy. It should be borne in mind here that reclamation is NOT ecological restoration. TNE's stated goal for successful reclamation is to achieve a "stable, sustainable, and productive landscape". Watch out for those words because a pasture, like Syncrude's bison paddock, satisfies this definition.

I also chastise Alberta SRD for succumbing to political pressure to amend the Fort McMurray-Athabasca oil Sands Subregional IRP. In my opinion, this IRP amendment is the single biggest scandal related to the entire Fort Hills project. To finish, I urge the Board, on behalf of AWA, to adopt the position that the general public's long-term interests would be best served by having MLWC officially established as a protected area, for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Both my talk and cross-examination go surprisingly smoothly, and remarkably, during the latter I manage to remain reasonably calm and collected. At one point, Denny Thomas tries to extol the virtues of TNE's Integrated Resource Management plan to me, whereby TNE and Al-Pac will coordinate their activities in order to minimize road-building, etc. For some reason, I fail to be impressed since the rape and destruction of this particular part of the Boreal Forest is still rape and destruction, no matter how carefully choreographed.

After my turn in the barrel is over, I am encouraged by the number of people, representing almost the entire spectrum of interest groups present in the room - including the oil sands industry, who convey their support for what I had to say. Halsey tells me she "enjoyed my talk" and that "she loves peatlands too". I am too gobsmacked to formulate any sensible reply.

John Malcolm's presentation provides a window on the difficulties the 200-member Wood Buffalo First Nation has encountered, since its formation in 1997, concerning their attempt to obtain official recognition. Clearly there is little love lost between Malcolm and TrueNorth's Bob Cox. John Malcolm refers to industry's (and KleinCo.'s) tried and true tactic of "divide and conquer" when it comes to their dealing with Aboriginal peoples (not to mention environmentalists).

The evening session involves presentations by an eight-member, mixed AENV/SRD panel chaired by Mr. Mike Boyd. Mr. Boyd manages the province's Sustainable Development Strategy for the Region - which purportedly "balances" development with environmental protection. Given the fact that less than 9% of Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region remains as wilderness, it is not difficult to guess which side this type of balance favours.

Mike Boyd begins by reading out a description of AENV's and SRD's official mandates and responsibilities. More fine-sounding words that, given the political realities of present-day Alberta, are virtually meaningless. Boyd emphasizes that the IRP amendment was a cabinet decision. His panel members read their

prepared statements, which I later learn required approval at the Deputy Minister level. Noel Saint-Jean (SRD) also reads out a crucial motherhood statement from the amended IRP, namely: "Surface mining within the Athabasca-Clearwater RMA shall maintain the water table, water chemistry and water flow within limits as indicated by natural fluctuations to maintain ecosystem diversity and function of the McClelland Lake wetland complex where surface mining is not allowed." More empty words I'm afraid, unless, of course, you believe that the "age of miracles" is not yet dead.

DAY 6: Wednesday, July 10:

Today commences with Karin Buss cross-examining the AENV/SRD panel. Initially she focuses on the dates when, (a) TNE applied for an amendment of the IRP (late Dec. 2001 or early Jan. 2002); (b) their request for an amendment was publicly announced (April 2002); and (c) the amended IRP was released to the public (June 24, 2002). It quickly becomes apparent that the Board, Alberta's legal counsel and the AENV/SRD panel regard the IRP amendment as a fait accompli that is basically

"off-limits" to interveners' questions. Alberta's lawyer states that it is "not productive to examine the IRP amendment process" since the decision to amend the IRP was made by cabinet. How do you spell "cover up"?

Critics like myself often say IRP really stands for "institutionalized rape and pillage" and the fact that MLWC was declared off-limits to mining (in the face of tremendous opposition by Alberta Energy) speaks volumes regarding its conservation value.

Public review of the proposed

amendment was limited to a two-day open-house held by SRD in Fort McMurray. Participants were provided a questionnaire that polarized the debate into "creating jobs for the future" and "contributing to economic growth" vs. "protecting the wetlands (fen)".

In Alberta the so-called "stakeholder process" is typically used (as John Ralston Saul would put it) as an "exclusionary device". MLWC belongs to all Albertans, not just the inhabitants of a single-industry boom town. As usual, SRD worked hard to achieve the (predetermined) "desired decision". The original IRP (1996) involved about four years of intense negotiation to craft. It only took two months for TNE's requested amendment to be approved.

Buss asked St. Jean for the meaning (in practical terms) of the amended IRP's motherhood statement (given above), and was told "the data are not there" to answer that question. Apparently, TNE's Sustainability Committee will determine what "maintain(ing) ecosystem diversity and function" actually means.

Dr. Horton continued to probe the IRP amendment and was told by Neil McCrank that "what led up to those decisions is not important to us". Since many people would not have attended the Hearings if the IRP had not been amended, I also considered it fair game. Alberta's lawyer got plenty of exercise jumping up to block my questions, and Neil McCrank told me to pursue another line of enquiry. The panel would not even answer my general question regarding the definition of a "stakeholder" under the IRP process.



Al-Pac clearcut near McClelland

R.G. Thomas

When I queried the absence of Parks and Protected Areas staff from the panel (which contained no botanists or peatland experts), I was told that the matter fell under the mantle of cabinet confidentiality. St. Jean even said that the location of the line delineating the western edge of the "no surface access" zone (within McClelland fen), which follows the section boundaries in stair-step fashion, had been decided by cabinet.

All in all, the panel's performance made me feel ashamed to be an Alberta taxpayer. One of the most pernicious legacies of the so-called "Klein revolution" is the incredible degree to which political interference has penetrated every level of the bureaucracy with respect to environment-related decision-making. Serving the best interests of Alberta's environment and the people of Alberta, has been replaced by serving the best interests of the Minister, the PC party and its political supporters, and one's career prospects. Whom or what did Neil McCrank have in mind when he told Mike Boyd that his panel had "looked after your client very well through this process"? As far as I'm concerned, the provincial government's evasiveness regarding the IRP amendment was the absolute low point of the entire Hearings.

By 4:50 pm everyone's evidence had been presented and, after a 10-minute breather, it was time for closing arguments. I found Denny Thomas's 45-minute exposition to be both depressing and, at one point, astonishing. He characterized the Mikisew Cree, Fort McKay and Athabasca-Chipewyan First nations as the only persons who can make a case for being "directly and adversely affected" by TNE's proposed development. (This is the EUB's ultimate weasel clause). Coincidentally, all three had signed Letters of Agreement with TNE and not intervened at these Hearings.

Then, in a thinly-veiled threat to the Board, Thomas declared that the democratically-elected government of Alberta had approved the IRP amendment and, hence, already made the policy decision that TNE's project is in the public interest and should go ahead. Basically, his argument was that the Board's function now was to formally approve TNE's application and set conditions regarding the development and operation of its mine. Thomas further pronounced that "the Board is bound to follow the intention of the Alberta government" - so much for the EUB's independence! Neil McCrank later asked Thomas to clarify his opinion that the Board was obligated to follow the IRP amendment.

Karin Buss's and Diana Horton's final remarks were excellent. Buss reminded the Board of its Whaleback decision which she regarded as a precedent for turning down TrueNorth's application.

Sometimes less is more, and I chose to limit my closing argument to five minutes duration. Thankfully, John Malcolm had the courage to say what many of us were thinking, i.e., Denny Thomas's earlier remarks (re the Board having to acquiesce to cabinet decisions pertaining to the IRP) were very disrespectful and made a mockery of both the Board and these Hearings.

After a few minor comments from other interveners the ordeal, for all concerned, was nearly over. A representative from the Federal Department of Justice reminded the Board that the Feds (primarily the Department of Fisheries and Oceans) would not be in a position to complete and present their submission to the EUB until September 6 of this year. Ordinarily the Board tries to render a decision within 90 days of the termination of any given Hearings.

In his closing remarks Neil McCrank hoped that the hearings process would "balance many competing interests" and that, as mandated, the Board would arrive at a decision that "will be in the public interest". The EUB is on record as stating it does not want to create "winners" and "losers". Unfortunately, the sad reality is that whenever humans compromise (e.g. over proposed development projects), inevitably it is the integrity of our environment that ends up being compromised.

After all was said and done, several TNE panelists walked over to shake hands with Diana, myself and others in "the environmental camp". One even told Diana that they'd do their best to take care of the fen (there's nothing like confidence in the Board's decision, eh?).



Pitcher Plant



R.G. Thomas in McClelland fen

I started thinking about one final study in contrasts. Rightly or wrongly, it was my feeling that for most oil sands executives attending the Hearings, MLWC simply represents columns of figures on a spreadsheet. The clinical and detached "professional" demeanour of the TNE panelists often contrasted markedly with the emotional involvement and passion that characterized MLWC's defenders. To them it was all part of a day's work; for us the plight of the fen touched something far deeper.

So, where do we go from here? My conclusions regarding the Hearings are as follows. First, aside from the threat to MLWC, there are plenty of serious environmental, socio-economic and technical issues related to TNE's proposed development. One oil sands executive even told that he thought there was considerable doubt that TNE could raise the cash required to finance the Fort Hills project if it receives EUB approval.

However, it seems highly unlikely that the Board will be able to deny TrueNorth's application given the level of political pressure behind its approval. That the IRP amendment has already occurred is crucial and, of course, is no accident or surprise. The Board will set numerous conditions, and thereby "raise the oil sands (approvals) bar" another notch, when it gives TNE the green light.

However, I truly believe that the oil sands industry in general, and TNE in particular, is vulnerable to negative publicity concerning MLWC. AWA and other NGOs need to join forces with US-based environmental groups to mount a public awareness campaign in Koch Industries backyard, and show potential users of TNE's oil the true upstream environmental impacts of their consumer choices.

It is extremely important that we do not give up on securing protection for MLWC. We have time and I am convinced this spectacular site can be saved. There are viable solutions to the problem confronting us. Already, a few of the more progressive voices in the oil sands community are talking about lease trading, or other companies supplying TNE with ore to replace that "lost" if MLWC is protected. The industry as a whole would (deservedly) score an enormous PR coup if such a deal could be brokered. However, Alberta Energy would undoubtedly oppose such a solution tooth and nail. We therefore need to prod, cajole, bully, persuade and shame KleinCo. into doing the right thing, for once, on behalf of Alberta's priceless natural heritage.

Halsey, L., Nicholson, B., Devito, K., and Vitt, D. 2001. Landscape and Landform Variation in Patterned Fens Within Alberta. In: Supporting Information For Alberta Government Review of Guidelines in Fort McMurray-Athabasca Oil Sands Sub-regional Integrated Resource Plan, Appendix 2 - Research Paper. http://www.truenorthenergy.com/html/irp/index2.htm#_Toc4232339

Closing Argument: Richard G. Thomas EUB Hearings, Wednesday, July 10, 2002

Mr. Chairman, members of the Board, Board Staff, ladies and gentlemen,

McClelland Lake Wetland Complex belongs to ALL Albertans - not just a select group of "stakeholders". Democracy had absolutely nothing to do with the recent amendment of the Ft. McMurray-Athabasca Oil Sands IRP.


In my professional opinion as a protected areas expert, this wetland complex as a whole is a unique and invaluable part of the province's natural heritage. Nothing I have heard or seen during the course of these hearings has made me doubt the validity of this assertion. Destruction of the MLWC for short-term economic gain would be an ecological and cultural disaster.

Optimistic talk of reclamation, mitigation, and maintaining the unmined portion of the complex in a "natural state" is both spurious and irrelevant. We are being asked to have faith that industry's technological fixes can somehow reproduce NATURAL ecological complexity and variability, a belief system that remains completely undemonstrated. The Board is being requested to allow TrueNorth Energy to unleash a devastating environmental experiment upon McClelland Lake fen, with no known precedent or (in the scientific sense) adequate "controls".


Any mining will inevitably result in the ecological integrity and other diverse values of the whole complex, being irretrievably compromised.

I have rarely seen a development-related controversy where the environmental "rights" and "wrongs" were so clearly defined.

In the opinion of the AWA, full protection of MLWC is undoubtedly in the best interests of BOTH the general public AND Alberta's oil sands industry. If mining within the fen receives official approval, we predict that the long-term negative PR impacts upon this industry, and its management by the Alberta government, will be severe and far-reaching.

Thank you. 

The TNE/MLWC situation - especially the behind-closed-doors amendment of the IRP and the role of Halsey et.al.'s (2001) paper in same - reminds me of a bumper sticker I saw in New England a few years ago. It said: "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention."

The fight to save the McClelland Lake fen has only just begun. 

(Richard Thomas is a researcher and consultant on Boreal Forest, migratory bird, and protected areas issues.)

Sour Gas Exploration in the Whaleback - Update

By James Tweedie


Ranchers and residents of the Maycroft community at the edge of the Whaleback remain vigilant as a speculative partnership of small-bit oil and gas companies attempt to put together a serious play directly adjacent to the newly created Bob Creek Wildland and Black Creek Rangeland protected areas. The companies involved, Polaris, Knight Petroleum and Ricks have secured agreement with the owner of the Bob's Creek Ranch, to get surface access to a potential drilling site (in exchange for an undisclosed share of future royalties), but they have yet to make a formal application to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board for their drilling licence.

One of the remaining obstacles is that the Nature Conservancy of Canada holds the mineral leases for the surrounding rights and the partnership will have to persuade the Conservancy to cooperate with them before they will hold the full section of lease required for sour gas drilling. Local landholders with interests and agreements with the Nature Conservancy warn that if the Conservancy cuts a deal with this partnership, it will be shooting itself in the foot in terms of any continued credibility with the ranching community in this area of southern Alberta.

Some of the landholders in this area who have extensive business experience in the oil patch question the ability of this speculative partnership to carry out this deep sour drilling program that would challenge the technical expertise of the big players like BP or Shell. They feel that the Board should turn this proposal down on technical and financial grounds, even if the environmental arguments aren't already grounds enough to do so.

Local community opposition to this drilling remains firm, and apart from the sell-out by a non-resident landowner, Polaris and Co. have been unable to resolve any of the community's concerns.

For further information contact James Tweedie at 403-628-2422, or to express your concern to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board send a fax to Stephen Smith at 403-297-4117 or an email to Karen Mather or Stephen Smith at the Applications Division of the AEUB:

Karen Mather@gov.ab.ca,
stephen.smith@gov.ab.ca 





Focus on Bighorn: MLAs Want to hear Your Voice

By Tamaini Snaith

For the past few months we have been trying very hard to work with the government, particularly with elected officials, on the Bighorn issues. We have continued to meet with local MLAs and government representatives.

We had a very successful meeting with Minister Gene Zwozdesky, responsible for parks and protected areas. Minister Zwozdesky is a strong supporter of protected areas in Alberta and promised to take a closer look at issues in the Bighorn.

In June we made a presentation to the Calgary Caucus, where Calgary MLAs gather to discuss various issues. Our presentation was very successful and MLAs took great interest in the political questions involved with respect to the Eastern Slopes



Wapiabi Creek

C. Olson

Policy and the ramifications of allowing it to be downgraded. The MLAs were also generally concerned about the unfair representation and lack of integrity of the access management process.

In August we are making a presentation to the Standing Policy Committee on Energy and Sustainable Resource Development. This presentation seems to be our one shot at really making a strong case to the policy-makers who are going to have to make the final decisions. ✍

So what can you do to help? You can write to your MLA (yes, again, and again, and again!). MLAs are telling us that they need to hear from more of us. Make sure they hear your voice loud and clear - you are their voting constituent and you want the Bighorn to be protected! Thank you and thank you and thank you.



Wapiabi Gap

C. Olson

Weir Proposed for Peace River

By Helene Walsh, Friends of the Peace

For more than two years now a proposal by Canadian Hydro Developers to build a weir on the Peace River has been going through the approval process in Alberta. Friends of the Peace, a conservation group based in Peace River, has been providing input to the process. AWA, CPAWS-Edm. and FAN have been supporting their efforts, and recently together submitted a formal request to the Federal Government for a more thorough review of the project.

The proposal is for a 6-meter weir on the Peace River just upstream of Dunvegan (north of Grande Prairie) for electrical generation. Public hearings will be held this fall by a



Peace River

C. Bruun

joint panel of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board and the Natural Resources Conservation Board.

The Peace River is the most diverse and productive river valleys in the Parkland of Canada. It is a nationally significant waterway which supplies water to the Peace Athabasca Delta, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. This project has potential to interfere with future efforts to enable flooding of the delta, a process which has been already seriously affected by the Bennett Dam on the Peace River in BC.

The Peace River supports several species of migratory and residential fish, the passage of fish both upstream and down are of concern with respect to this project.

The south facing slopes of the river valley support the last remaining habitat for prairie and parkland vegetation which has virtually all been destroyed by agricultural development throughout Alberta. Those south facing slopes will be subject to increased slumping and invasion by weeds as a result of this project.

Several other sites along the Peace River are being considered for weirs, the determination on this project will set a precedent for this kind of development along the Peace.

A more thorough review of this project is necessary through the federal Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. ✍

Expanding the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park

By Wendy Francis

There is now an incredible opportunity to help complete Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park by adding 100,000 acres of the Flathead Valley in southeastern BC to Waterton and establishing a corridor of wildlife management from there west and north. Through the efforts of a number of environmental groups on both sides of the border, and many others, this vision is a real possibility. Strong expressions of support are needed to ensure the right land use management decision. Please, visit www.peaceparkplus.net for background information and to fax your letter to decision-makers. ✍



A Rancher Challenges the Cattle Industry and Its Critics

By Hyland Armstrong, AWA Director



In the fall of 1991 I returned to the University of Saskatchewan to obtain a Masters Degree. There were a number of reasons why I chose to return to university. Perhaps the most important reason was to develop a better understanding of the landscapes found on my ranch and the role my management plays in shaping the structure and function of these landscapes.

In 1983 I joined the Society for Range Management, Canadian Society of Animal Science, American Society of Animal Science and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. My goal was to keep abreast with the latest developments in range science ("Journal of Range Management" and "Rangelands"), animal science ("Canadian Journal of Animal Science" and "American Journal of Animal Science") and general science ("Science" and "Nature").

Of these journals, The Journal of Range Management (published by the Society for Range Management) had the largest influence on my attitude toward resource management. This journal (Journal of Range Management) dealt with issues that were closely related to resource management. My subscription to "Science" was also valuable.

Over the past two decades "Science" has dealt with issues such as global warming and endangered species; issues that are now becoming "hot" political issues. Unfortunately, as time passed it became clear to me many of the articles published in "The Journal of Range Management" and "Science" required a deeper understanding in ecology than what I possessed. Therefore, in the fall of 1991 I returned to university to obtain a Master's degree.

Upon returning to university I had to make a number of adjustments. The least of which was getting back into the "groove" of studying. The second adjustment was dealing with professors and fellow grad students who were, to say the least, sceptical of how ranchers manage their resources. This scepticism, on the part of my professors and fellow grad students, was a blessing in disguise. Not only was I given an opportunity to look at the ranching industry (and its management practices) from a new perspective, I was given an opportunity to challenge some of the most ardent critics of the cattle industry.

When I graduated, it was not my intent to become involved in environmental politics. I had hoped to spend most of my time conversing with ranchers about the joys of resource management. About this time the Federal Government introduced the Endangered Species Act (version 1.0) and the provincial government introduced Special places 2000 and a review of the grazing lease. Judging from the cattle industry's responses to these issues, a heated debate was in the offing.

At this time I made a number of suggestions to several of the prominent industry groups (Alberta Cattle Commission and the Western Stock Growers' Association). I suggested the best way to

deal with these issues was to develop a campaign showing, to the general public, the role livestock grazing can play in managing biodiversity. Unfortunately, neither group showed any interest in this unique concept. This lack of interest eventually lead to me becoming disillusioned with the cattle industry's ability to deal with these important issues.

As a matter of self-preservation I took a bold step and began developing a program of my own. In 1995 I began giving public presentations explaining the role livestock plays in managing the biodiversity associated with my ranch. My presentation looks at livestock grazing from the ecological perspective. This presentation shows how the structure and function of landscapes (and ecosystems) can be manipulated by altering grazing intensity.

The important components of landscape structure are: topography, soils and the plant communities associated with the landscape. Landscape function is the nutrient and energy cycles associated with a particular landscape. The landscape's structure and function determine the resources found on that landscape and

how wildlife and humans use the landscape.

Grazing intensity is a combination of factors. These factors are: the timing of grazing, how much material is removed, how much time the area has to recover from grazing and for how long the livestock remains on the site. Grazing intensity is manipulated by adjusting stocking rates, livestock distribution and livestock densities. In other words, my presentation treats livestock grazing as a tool to achieve specific ecological goals.

This presentation has been beneficial to me in a number of ways. It has given me an opportunity to discuss the important issues of the day (the management of public lands or endangered species habitat) without the histrionics. This presentation attempts to provide the audience (naturalists, biologists and the general public) with an honest assessment of the role livestock can play in the management of landscapes and wildlife habitat.

By giving these presentations and listening to the concerns of the audience I have gained a better appreciation for the complex nature of the issues I am dealing with and the concerns the other stakeholders may have. One most important aspect of this presentation is it has provided me with a mechanism to initiate several important wildlife habitat management projects on my ranch. All of these projects have been planned in co-operation with organizations such as: Ducks Unlimited, Cows and Fish, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Alberta Conservation Association, Public Lands and Alberta Fish and Wildlife

Initially this presentation was given in the form of public speaking engagements. This presentation has evolved from public speaking engagements, to a photographic display and finally into a web site (www.shockware.com/elkcattle). I will continue to present my views, in a public forum. However, the focus of my presentations will change. In the past my presentations focused on my resource management.



My future presentations will focus on challenging the cattle industry. Instead of using simple "catch phrases" to answer the criticism levelled against it; it is my hope the cattle industry will follow my example and show how they manage their resources. It is also my hope that my presentations will encourage the general public to begin to realize that they (the public) can also play an important role in resolving the issues we face.

Livestock grazing has historically been an economic endeavour with very little attention paid to the role livestock grazing can play in managing ecosystems. This presentation, in my opinion, shows livestock grazing can be used to manage ecosystems and act as an economic catalyst. I believe that my presentations have also shown that the issues we face can be discussed rationally and ways can be found to manage our resources intelligently. ✍

(Hyland Armstrong is a rancher in the Cypress Hills area and a Range Management Specialist.)



© Donna Jo Massie

Proposed Development at Castle Mountain Resort (CMR)

The following letter was sent July 12, 2002 to the M.D. Council of Pincher Creek as AWA's submission to the Hearing on the resort.

Dear Councilors,

The Castle Mountain area has been a long-standing area of concern for the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) and our interest is to see the wilderness values of the area maintained in perpetuity. We are very concerned about Castle Mountain Resort's proposed expansion and we request that you do not approve the CMR Area Structure Plan (ASP).

Residential and intensive recreational developments are incompatible with maintaining wilderness, and the proposed development will seriously threaten the ecological values in this area.

In addition, we would like to request that any approval of the ASP be conditional on the establishment of a wildland recreation area as required by NRCB's Decision Report Application #9201-Vacation Alberta Corporation.

Thank you for your continued efforts to protect the long-term environmental and ecological value of the Castle wilderness.

Sincerely, Tamaini Snaith ✍

It's Time to End Game Farming

We've said it for 15 years - it's time to end game farming. While applauding the Alberta government's decision to deny penned 'hunts', AWA joined the Alberta Fish and Game Association and Alliance for Public Wildlife in calling upon both federal and provincial governments to immediately dismantle game farming and the legislation upon which it was based.

At a press conference, August 13, we pointed out that compensation - to assist the individuals to leave the industry and to protect public wildlife and wildlife economies - is both necessary and justified; but any efforts to prop up the industry are badly misguided. Compensation would be contingent on the complete dismantling of the industry.

"Contrary to the repeated claims by government, game farming has never been viable in Alberta and it never will be," said Vivian Pharis, AWA Director. "Global markets for meat and antler have always been limited and are effectively closed indefinitely to North American producers because of Chronic Wasting Disease [CWD]. It is unfortunate that Premier Klein and agriculture minister Shirley McClellan have encouraged some game farmers with talk of help to find new markets because they are doomed to fail."

Last week the Alberta government gave a resounding "no" to penned hunting; but most game farmers had already come to the realization that penned hunts would not make the industry viable. Game farmers had convened emergency meetings well before the decision on penned 'hunts', and when votes were taken, an overwhelming majority agreed that the industry would not be viable, and indicated they would leave if some level of compensation was possible.

"The combination of diseases, saturated markets, and severe drought have all converged to make this situation desperate, and it will get far worse if we don't take action," said Darrel Rowledge of the Alliance for Public Wildlife. "Our governments

refused any and all legitimate analysis, yet they consistently lured people into this industry-in the face of



Game farm elk

all evidence," he said. "We cannot simply abandon people in this situation; they need our help, and it is in our best interest to do what's right. That means completely dismantling the industry."

Even though it is illegal, some game farmers have threatened to release game farm animals to the wild because they can't afford to feed them. All sides oppose such irresponsible (and illegal) action.

The three groups propose an end to game farming by:

- A full dismantling of the industry in Alberta and a retraction of all relevant regulations and legislation.
- Limited compensation to game farmers based on number of animals as of June 30, 2002, contingent upon the complete elimination of the industry.
- The humane killing of all game farmed animals; their brains to be submitted for testing and carcasses incinerated.
- Removal of game farm fences only after inspection confirms it free of disease.
- Agreement by those indemnified to leave the industry permanently.
- The development of a wildlife policy that is protective of wildlife.

We held press conferences on July 22 and August 13. Our latest news releases on the game farming issue can be found on our website. Another website of interest: www.maddeer.org ✍



The South Saskatchewan River Leaves Its Mark On All Who Visit

By John Geary

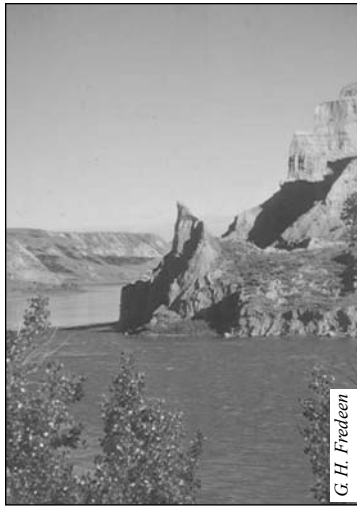
There are very few large pieces of wild and natural prairie ecosystem left in Alberta. One of the largest and few remaining truly wild areas on Alberta's southern prairies lies along the South Saskatchewan River. The stretch of badlands from Medicine Hat northeast to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border is particularly spectacular.

That section would have changed irrevocably if plans to build the Meridian Dam had gone through. However, the valley's beauty will, for the near future, remain unaltered by any mega projects.

The beauty of the badlands prevalent along the river valley east of Medicine Hat exerts a mystical pull on visitors from the very first time they encounter it, a pull that never really lets go.

Dawn Dickinson of Medicine Hat is a longstanding member of the Grassland Naturalists, and co-author of the book, *Prairie River*. She first experienced the river almost 40 years ago, and still finds herself drawn by its allure.

"I was going down the river with a group of volunteers banding prairie falcons for the Canadian Wildlife Service, as it is a prime area for nesting raptors," she says. "We camped along the way, and it was just beautiful ... we watched rattlesnakes, antelope and saw all kinds of birds.



Rapid Narrows

"I've never forgotten drifting silently down the deep canyon at the end of the day, watching the sun just hit the top of the cliffs and seeing a pair of marvelous golden eagles sitting there on a nest, catching the full gold of the sun."

"It is a lovely river, not touched very much by all the developments that have gone on."

She has paddled a canoe down the river many times since then, and never tires of its beauties.

Calgary resident Greg Fredeen is an avid paddler and conservation-minded outdoorsman. He has canoed the river twice with his family. He says looking at a map of the area first drew him to the South Saskatchewan.

"I've always loved paddling prairie rivers, and when I looked at a map, I saw no roads crossed it for many miles, so it looked like a prime area to paddle," he says. "I'd also read articles about the military base and how it is

like a nature preserve, with no one allowed in there and development restricted."

Fredeen has paddled from Medicine Hat to the Saskatchewan border twice, and marvels at the wildlife and wild lands along the valley.

"It's one of the few places you can access a large expanse of prairie wilderness," he says. "Paddling downriver from Medicine Hat, you don't see any people again for 160 km. There are very few places you can do that in Alberta.

"It's backcountry wilderness where no one expects it to be."

Retired Major Dan Davies worked at CFB Suffield for nine years. The base runs along the northeast bank of the river, and in his time working there, he has grown to love the area.

"The river is wild and free, it's nature as it was meant to be, with no people, no smog, no traffic," says Davies. "It's just peaceful solitude with Mother Nature in control instead of mankind."

Davies says it is very important to leave an area like this for future generations.

"I've ridden up and down both sides of the valley on horseback with my daughter. Some day I'd like her to be able to do the same thing with her children."

Davies is a realist; he says we cannot hold back development and progress indefinitely. But he says we can rethink how we develop the land around us.

"Maybe we can impose a delay until a better measure of 'progress' is defined."

Cliff Wallis, AWA president, sums up the impact this valley has on anyone who spends any time exploring its wonders.

"It is an incredibly diverse and awe-inspiring place," he says.

"The canyon is one of the most spectacular on the Canadian plains."

"Most importantly, it represents the triumph of conservationists over subsidized unsustainable agriculture. These rare victories should be treasured, honored and communicated widely." ✂



G. H. Fredeen



G. H. Fredeen

Blue heron

AIPac Defers Touchwood Lake Harvest for One Year

Alberta Pacific Forest Industry is planning to defer its Touchwood Lake harvesting plan for at least one year in order to conduct salvage operations in the area of the House River fire. The May fire occurred in an area between Lac La Biche and Fort McMurray and burned almost 250,000 hectares of forest. Vince Eggleston, Al-Pac's Woodlands Operations Planner told the Lac La Biche Post that Al-Pac could recover as much as 5.7 million cubic meters of burned but merchantable timber, enough to run the mill for two and a half years. Salvaged timber must be harvested as soon as possible. ✂



DONNA JO MASSIE: ARTIST DRAWS ON CONNECTION WITH MOUNTAINS

By John Geary

It should come as no real surprise that Canmore artist Donna Jo Massie, who draws so much inspiration from nature, has a strong environmental education background.

Like many successful artists, she did not set out to paint for a living, earning her degree in environmental education at the University of Auburn.

"When I was in university, it was a little iffy to study for an art degree. My grandfather put me through school and wanted me to have something solid to fall back on."

A visit to Kananaskis led to a permanent move north in 1976, when she landed a position in the park's environmental education program.

"I just came up to see the area, and fell in love with it," she says. "I worked part-time in environmental education until 1988, when I decided I wanted to do art full time. I'd reached a point where it was time to take a leap, so I wouldn't look back in 10 years and say, 'Gee, I wish I had done that.'"

Being born and growing up near North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains National Park instilled an early love of nature in the Canmore-based artist, particularly a love of mountains. Living in Alberta's Rockies helps her maintain that love, a love that forms the basis of her artwork.

"As an artist, you have to paint what you love and what you know," she says. "When I came here, it was an extension of the mountains I'd been born in. I need to be in a place where I can be in the woods and mountains just by walking out my front door. It helps keep me grounded."

Massie loves painting in the mountains because the combination of high elevation, clean air and low humidity produces what she calls a "pure light," something she does not always see at other locations.

Massie's family has a strong artistic tradition. Her great-grandmother was a bead worker, her grandmother a master weaver. Her great aunt made rugs. Massie says she never felt a pull toward weaving or rug making though, but she always liked drawing and painting. When she did try her hand at painting, it did not take her long to find her niche.



© Donna Jo Massie

"The first time I worked with watercolour, I just knew it was what I wanted to work with - it was like love at first sight. I liked what it did ... when you put it on, you have to be very focused, very in the moment with watercolours. With oils you can always scrape over it, but you can't do that with watercolours."

Working with watercolours makes it easier to paint on location in the wilderness in which she loves to hike and capture in her art. While Massie paints a great deal on location, she also uses sketches and photos to record images to turn into paintings back in her studio.


"That also helps you draw on your experience in the natural world. If you know a subject, know what the light can be like, if you know along this riverbed, there'll be fireweed, even if it's not there when you're painting, you can put it in."

Massie still draws on her education background, teaching adult art classes in Canmore. She also shares her knowledge in books. Her most recent publication is *Rocky Mountain Sketchbook - A Step by Step Guide to*

Watercolour Painting and Drawing in the Mountain Landscape, published in 1999, and recently re-published.

Her latest project involved spending three days at Lake O'Hara this past July, to prepare for an upcoming two-person art show called *The Magic of Lake O'Hara*. It takes place in Banff's Canada House this October, and features Massie's work alongside that of B.C. artist Robert Genn.

Although she no longer works as an environmental educator, Massie continues her involvement in conservation. She spent seven years on the board of the Friends of Kananaskis and has donated paintings to the AWA and the Alpine Club to help them with their fundraising efforts.

"I try to support environmental groups by donating paintings, and I hope my work helps draw attention to wilderness conservation and remind people about the special, unique areas that need protection." 



Ringrose Peak

© Donna Jo Massie



BIGHORN TRAIL TRIP 2002 AWESOME ADVENTURE IN THE BACKCOUNTRY

By Tamaini Snaith

Spectacular. Moving. Awesome. These are the only words I have to describe the Bighorn Wildland.

We have just returned from the annual AWA trail maintenance trip along the historic Bighorn trail. The trail runs from Crescent Falls, near Nordegg, to the Chungo Gap and includes much of the Wapiabi, Vimy Creek, Sunkay, George Creek and Blackstone valleys. It is a historic horse trail currently used by backpackers, equestrians, outfitters, and



Tamaini Snaith and Dan Olson crossing Wapiabi Creek

trappers, but its use by First Nations likely extends far beyond recorded history.

We set off from the Wapiabi Gap. Vivian and Dick Pharis, along with a dedicated

volunteer, Rod Burns traveled by horse, with a few extra horses as a pack string to carry our tents and all the trail-clearing gear. Christyann and Dan Olson and myself made the entire trip by foot. We logged over a hundred kilometres of breathtaking scenery, weathering exhausting midday heat, drowning rainstorms, and even a violent late-night hailstorm.

Luckily the trail was in good shape this year (thanks to many years of dedicated work by Vivian and the AWA trail team), so we were able to enjoy many of our days simply hiking and enjoying the scenery.

We spent the first two days traveling to our first camp at Vimy ridge. Vimy creek runs along a long, straight valley. Looking east you see the characteristic diagonal stratigraphy of the Bighorn Range, and looking west are the massive front ranges of the Rocky Mountains.

Day three marked our first real workday. We traveled south along the trail through huge alpine meadows and foothills forest towards the Sunkay and Crescent falls. We passed by many trees moved a few years ago by former trail trip members during a particularly work-intensive trip and the evidence of their labour was clear. Luckily, the trees have since learned to be cooperative and most of the deadfall was away from the trail. We found very little work to do, and finished the trail section in only one day.

We saw the trails of lots of wildlife including bears, wolves, deer, moose, elk, and maybe even a cougar. At dusk we crossed the ridge to quietly watch the valley and wallowing elk. But the shy beasts kept themselves well hidden, and all we saw was a large mule deer. That night we heard wolves calling from all directions. Hearing wolves was one of the things on my life wish-list, and it was definitely worth the wait.

The next day we had about 20 km to cover to get to the camp on George Creek. We hikers set out early to get a head start on the riders, and decided to go cross-country, rather than follow the river valleys, to cut off a few miles. Dan navigated beautifully and we had a fantastic day crossing ridges and valleys.

For a good part of the day we followed the old seismic cut-lines from the 1950s exploration days. From the top of a ridge you can see the lines extend to the horizon in both directions. These are 50-year-old lines have not closed up with forest re-growth. This really reinforced to me the urgency of making sure new roads are not build through this area. No matter how much mitigation is done to make sure environmental impacts are small, roads do not go away easily.


We crossed through the Wapiabi Valley and enjoyed the wild flowers and paid our respects at an ancient Stoney gravesite. The Wapiabi Valley is quite amazing and gives an incredibly wide and sweeping view of the front range. The view was just so big that it didn't even fit into my camera lens, and I just can't capture it in words.

When we descended into the George Creek Valley, the view was stunning, and although we didn't see any wildlife (actually Christyann saw wild horses, but didn't tell us because at the time she thought it was just our pack string!), we found lots of bones and antlers. These valleys provide important forage and water for ungulates, which means good hunting for carnivores.

After such a long day of hiking we really needed our daily chocolate fix and enjoyed an evening by the campfire.

The George Creek section of the trail was the most arduous work day - long hours of cutting back willows in 35 degree heat is no easy task, but we got it done and the trail is now in tip-top shape. Next year we will have to concentrate on the northernmost section to the Chungo Gap that we did not get to this year.

It was ten days of pure wonder for me, and to have such experienced guides who know the area better than anyone was really an amazing experience.

If you want a wilderness experience, go to the Bighorn. If you want to help fight for wilderness in Alberta, fight for the Bighorn. It's worth it. And then some. 

Wilderness Celebration 2002

You are invited to
a sparkling celebration of Wild Alberta



Join us for an evening of fine drink,
good food, and exciting entertainment

Swing to Canada's premier jump blues band,
the Dino Martinis

Laugh with the improv comedy of Loose Moose Theatre



Compete in exciting auctions and unique raffles

Win a Thrill of a Lifetime ride on the range with Ian Tyson



October 19th, 2002

Appetizers and Auction Viewing 6:30
Entertainment begins at 7:00,
dinner follows

Glenmore Inn, Calgary



Alberta Wilderness Association

Tickets \$75

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November 1, 2001
The **Alberta Wilderness & Wildlife Trust**

presents

POST COWBOY ECONOMICS: *Pay and Prosperity in the New West*

with **Dr. Thomas Power**

Are the economic woes afflicting the North American West caused by increasingly strict environmental regulations on natural resource industries?

Will efforts to protect ecosystems and endangered wildlife lead to economic insecurity?

Can protection of wild lands benefit local economies or is resource extraction necessary for economic survival?

How important is the quality of the natural landscape to a community's economic base?

Join Dr. Thomas Power in a discussion of how the west is changing, surviving and thriving.

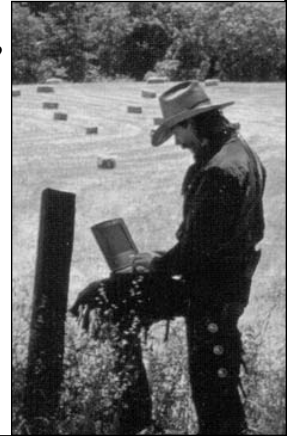
Location: AWA Office, 455, 12 St. NW, Calgary

Time: 6:00 pm - Reception

7:00 pm - Lecture and Alberta Wilderness Defenders Awards

Cost: \$25.00

Call: 283-2025 for information and reservations



Dr. Thomas Michael Power is currently Professor of Economics and Chairman of the Economics Department at the University of Montana. He specializes in natural resource and regional economic development issues.

Professor Power received his undergraduate degree in Physics from Lehigh University where he graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. He did his graduate work at Princeton University on a Woodrow Wilson national fellowship. He received his masters and doctorate from Princeton in Economics.

Professor Power has taught at Princeton, Lehigh, and the University of Montana where he has been since 1968. He has been Chairman of the Economics Department since 1978.

Professor Power's most recent book, *Post-Cowboy Economics: Pay and Prosperity in the New American West*, was published in Summer 2001 by Island Press. In 1996 Island Press published his *Lost Landscapes and Failed Economies: The Search for a Value of Place*. An earlier book, *The Economic Pursuit of Quality* (M.E. Sharpe Publishers, 1988) was revised, rewritten, and published in 1996 under the title *Environmental Protection and Economic Well Being: The Economic Pursuit of Quality*.

In addition he has written a dozen book chapters and over a hundred papers, reports, and monographs in the field of resource economics and regional economic development.

He regularly testifies before state and federal regulatory agencies on energy policy, natural resource development, environmental protection, and local economic development. He is a regular commentator on economic issues on Montana Public Radio and in the national press. He testified in the Hearings for the Oldman River Dam and participated in the Meridian Dam Public Forum in Medicine Hat last year.



© Donna Jo Massie

For all the
latest news,
check our
website:

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca



Sunshine Meadows

© Donna Jo Massie



OPEN HOUSE TALKS PROGRAM — FALL 2002

Location: The Hillhurst Room,
AWA, 455 12th St NW, Calgary
Time: 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Cost: \$4:00 per person; children free
Contact: (403) 283-2025 for reservations

Tuesday September 17, 2002
**Alberta's Elusive Predators: Wolverines,
Fishers and Martens**
with Jonathan Wright

Jonathan gave a thoroughly enjoyable presentation to AWA in April on the Snakes of the Alberta plains. He now returns to give a fascinating insight into the lives of some of the less well-known mammals of the northern boreal forests. Jonathan has a wealth of information, and some beautiful slides. We welcome his somewhat lateral approach to wildlife studies in Alberta!

Tuesday October 14, 2002
Wildlife First Aid - Rockyview Wildlife Recovery
with Deb Fettig

Rockyview Wildlife Recovery (RWR) works hard to retrieve, treat and rehabilitate injured and orphaned wildlife. They are committed to the long-term conservation of Alberta's wildlife through a program of rehabilitation, education and research. Deb is one of a team of volunteers working to help raise the profile of RWR. Special guest, Blackjack, the Swainson's hawk, will also put in an appearance.

Tuesday December 3, 2002
Great Horned Owls in Alberta
with Grahame Booth

Grahame has been working for the last 6 years monitoring great horned owls in Calgary and the surrounding area. Like so many wildlife experts in Alberta, his work is entirely self-funded, inspired by a long-term fascination with these awesome birds. He will be presenting slides of the every day lives of the owls, and information on what they are feeding on and how.

Editorial Board:
Shirley Bray, Ph.D
Peter Sherrington, Ph.D
Andy Marshall
Graphic Designer:
Tammy L. Nischuk
Printer:
MRC Document Services

Web Host: qbiz.ca
Please direct questions
and comments to:
Shirley Bray
Phone: 270-2736
Fax: 270-2743
awa.wrc@shaw.ca
www.AlbertaWilderness.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.

2002 Membership Drive

Congratulation to Mr. John Groeneveld, winner of AWA's membership drive grand prize - a weekend for two at the beautiful Aurum Lodge in Bighorn Country as guests of Alan and Madeleine Ernst. ❧



© Donna Jo Massie



Moraine Lake

© Donna Jo Massie

Notice of Annual General Meeting

November 30, 2002

The Annual General Meeting of the Alberta Wilderness Association and the Alberta Wilderness Institute will be held in Calgary on November 30, 2002 at 11:00 am.

Date: November 30, 2002

Time: 11:00 am

Please call the office for further details
(403) 283-2025.

All members are welcome to attend.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

March 8, 2003 Wilderness Celebration in Edmonton

Volunteers Needed for this exciting new event.
An evening of good food,
entertainment and silent auction.
We have two great organizers in Edmonton for this
event and they need your help. Contact our
Calgary office
403-283-2025 or awa@shaw.ca



"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

Alberta Wilderness Association	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wilderness Circle	\$2500 - \$5000
<input type="checkbox"/> Philanthropist	\$1000
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustainer	\$500
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate	\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporter	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	_____

Alberta Wilderness Resource Centre	
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron - greater than \$1000	
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$1000
<input type="checkbox"/> Partner	\$500
<input type="checkbox"/> Friend	\$100



☐ Cheque ☐ Visa ☐ M/C Amount \$ _____

Card #: _____ Expiry Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Prov. _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone (home): _____ Phone (work): _____

E-mail: _____ Signature _____

☐ **I wish to join the Monthly Donor Programme!**

I would like to donate \$ _____ monthly. Here is my credit card number OR my voided cheque for bank withdrawal. *I understand that monthly donations are processed on the 1st of the month (minimum of \$5 per month).*

The AWA respects the privacy of members. Lists are not sold or traded in any manner. The AWA is a federally registered charity and functions through member and donor support. Tax-deductible donations may be made to the Association at: Box 6398 Station D, Calgary, AB T2P 2E1. Telephone (403) 283-2025 Fax (403) 270-2743 E-mail a.w.a@shaw.ca Website <http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca>



"Thrill of a Lifetime" Raffle

You and a friend will go riding on the range with singer/songwriter Ian Tyson in June 2003. Gourmet Lunch Included

Draw : October 19th, 2002 at the Wilderness Celebration Dinner and Auction.

- Day to be arranged at a mutually agreeable time
- Prize must be accepted as offered
- Travel to and from the Tyson Ranch (Longview, Alberta) not included
- Lunch must be picked up by the winner
- Winner releases AWA and its agents and assumes all risks related to the prize

TICKETS: \$10.00 Each
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Purchase Tickets by Phone or Mail from the:

Alberta Wilderness Association
Box 6398 Station D, Calgary AB T2P 2E1
(403) 283-2025
www.AlbertaWilderness.ca



The Alberta Wilderness Association
Box 6398, Station D
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E1

