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THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

A magnificent view from the Cypress Hills - J. Geary

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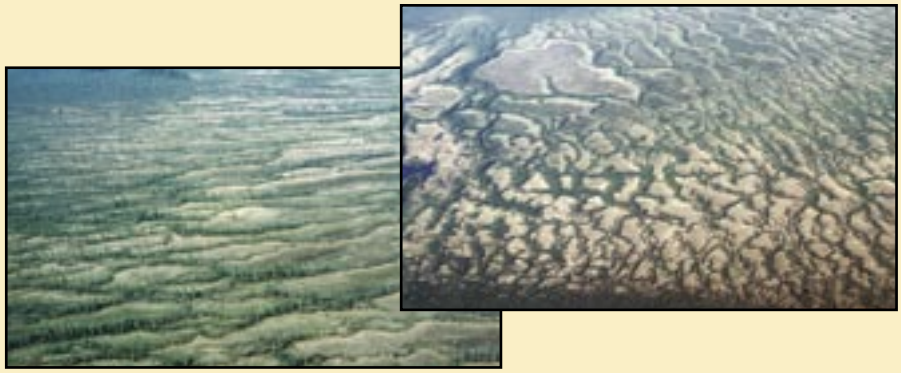
Please direct questions and comments to:
Shirley Bray
Phone: 270-2736
Fax: 270-2743
awa.wrc@shaw.ca
www.albertawilderness.ca

AWA

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

Box 6398, Station D,
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E1
Ph: (403) 283-2025
Toll-free 1-866-313-0713
www.albertawilderness.ca
e-mail: awa@shaw.ca



R. Thomas

McClelland Fen

MORE THAN ENOUGH SCANDALS AT HOME

Premier Klein may be upset about the allegations of federal Liberal corruption in the sponsorship scandal, but before he starts casting stones, maybe he should deal with scandals in his own backyard. In this issue we deal with two scandalous issues the Alberta government thinks are fine just the way they are.

In 1987, the government introduced legalized game farming in Alberta ignoring the warnings of scientists about disease, parasites, genetic pollution, and the fact that commercialization of wildlife is its greatest known enemy and antithetical to our world-renown system of wildlife conservation. They ignored warnings that the industry was unsustainable. They ignored the wishes of the public. The entire process has been described as one of the most corrupt in Canadian history. It was not just undemocratic; it was deliberately manipulated by government to force a particular result, over the express wishes of Albertans.

Now Albertans are paying a heavy price – dealing with Chronic Wasting Disease, a non-native disease introduced through game farm animal imports. The government is also spending millions of dollars in subsidies to prop up the industry, considering game farm animals as part of its "diversified livestock" industry, even though desperate game farmers want to get out of the industry, the market is non-existent, and the former agriculture minister admitted it was unviable.

The second scandal involves a world class wetland site in northern Alberta – the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex. The Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for the region once protected this area from oil sands mining because of its high conservation value. The area is an important migratory bird stopover and has two of Alberta's largest and best spectacular ancient patterned fens.

In 2002, the government rushed through an IRP amendment, without following due process, and with extremely poor public consultation. Now one of the fens is slated for destruction from oil sands surface mining. Once again, thanks to our government's plutolatry, it has sold our natural heritage, our true wealth, for a quick buck.

Klein wants to campaign for the federal Conservatives, but if leader Stephen Harper is thinking of taking a page from the Alberta Conservative book on how to do things, we should all be on guard.

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"BLOW-DOWN" IN THE CYPRESS HILLS: WIND FARM PROPOSAL SPARKS CLASH OF VALUES

By Dr. Shirley Bray

When Cypress County councilors brought out the management plan for the area surrounding Cypress Hills Provincial Park in 2003, they prized the "impressive views of relatively undisturbed landscape" spreading to the north through rolling native prairie and south to the Sweetgrass Hills. They recognized the Cypress Hills as "a special and unique place." But now a slick salesman from Ontario has got them ready to throw that plan aside and replace the pristine prairie landscape with "beautiful" wind farms and the beautiful money they can generate.

West WindEau Inc. owner, David Boileau has been honing his wind power message for a few years now, most recently as president of Superior Wind Energy, a Brascan Power Corporation subsidiary in Ontario. His proposal to put a 100MW wind farm northeast of Cypress Hills Provincial Park, on environmentally sensitive native prairie, with plans to expand to 200MW or more, has had the typical effect of dividing the community into those who want to cash in on this latest exploitation of the land and those who want to maintain the native landscape.

Without a provincial policy for wind energy development, counties are left scrambling to determine how wind energy should be developed in their areas. And that means local landowners have a lot of say in what happens. But what do you do when the wind farm threatens to compromise a nationally significant viewscape and increasingly rare native prairie, both of which have economic importance as well?

Surrounding Cypress Hills Provincial Park is a 278 km^2 area known as the Fringe, a mixture of public and private land with some of the best large blocks of native prairie left in the province. From viewpoints high in the Park you can get a sense of what the original prairie was like. It's the kind of landscape that draws an astonished "wow" from first time visitors.

Over half of the fringe is a national environmentally significant area and conservation assessments by the Nature Conservancy, the Northern Plains Conservation Network and World Wildlife Fund highlight its international significance as well. *The Cypress Hills Fringe Area Structure Plan* (ASP, Bylaw 2003/03) was created to maintain a buffer zone around the Park of agricultural land, especially to preserve high value native rangeland, and specifies the importance of protecting viewscapes. Rising demand for country residential development seems to be one of its main concerns and wind farms are not even mentioned.

Most councilors were initially against a wind farm in the Fringe, but after a seminar with Boileau, the tide turned, helped along by local landowners who see wind farms as a lucrative source of steady income. With only a few large landowners to deal with in the Fringe, the company sees less hassle and is promising them typical payments of $3000 to $5000 a year per turbine. He describes wind as another cash crop that farmers can harvest. With Boileau promising to fill County coffers to the tune of $300,000 a year in taxes, councillors are leaning towards an easier solution of allowing wind farm development in the Fringe, rather than tossing the plan out completely.

C. Olson

Castle Ridge Wind Farm, Pincher Creek – Do these turbines enhance the view?

Cypress County Reeve, Jack Osadczuk, a strong proponent of wind power, who also sat on the Steering Committee for the Plan, is of the opinion that the Fringe Plan is just an extension of the Park and "we're not in the business of the Park."

But according to the ASP, "Cypress Hills Park plays a pivotal role in the future land use of the fringe area." Visitation by users, "their use of facilities, trips to viewpoints and

demand for services will in part be affected by land use decisions in the fringe."

But not all councilors or landowners have been seduced. One diligent councillor, who doesn't wish to be named, has worked to get the Fringe excluded from areas allowed for wind farms in a new bylaw (2005/03) the Council has drafted allowing Wind Energy Facilities. He knows it's not just a local issue.

known for its remarkable biodiversity, the product of the meeting of montane, grassland and semi-arid desert landscapes and its cooler, moister climate than the surrounding prairie. It is the headwaters for three major watersheds and numerous springs and wetlands. Relict Foothills fescue and mixedgrass prairie cover the majority of the area.

Already, more than 80% of Alberta's native prairie has been lost,

opponents also point out that roads will open the area for public use, including hunters and "curious people," consequences that landowners may not realize.

It is well-known that native fescue, prized for its high protein content and durability, and so crucial for wintering ungulates, cannot be reclaimed after significant disturbance. The ASP notes that "the native prairie has been the economic mainstay of

C. Wershler

Northern fringe area of Cypress Hills and site of proposed wind farm

"That area belongs to every man, woman and child, all of Canada, and our future generations," he says. The local conservation group Grasslands Naturalists and Alberta Wilderness Association have waded into the debate because they know the importance of protecting our last prairie remnants.

A public hearing on April 19 to review the draft bylaw may be the last chance for protecting the Fringe and there are powerful arguments in its favour.

The Roadless Prairie

"There's only 3 miles of road in that whole area [north of the Park]," says the local councillor. "Some ranchers who have lived there all their lives don't realize what a beautiful area it is."

The Cypress Plateau spreads out into rolling, hummocky terrain with lesser hills west and north of the Park. Left partially unglaciated, the area is

transformed by agriculture, industry and urbanization. Only 20% of the mixed grass subregion has more than 75% of native prairie remaining; the Cypress Hills is one of the few areas with large blocks more than 10 km^2 left. The ASP recognizes these grasslands as "a scarce ecological resource." Most of Alberta's endangered species are on the grasslands. The government acknowledges that it has not met conservation targets of the Grassland Natural Region, but it continues to sell and develop native prairie without a proper public lands policy or public consultation.

Opponents are concerned that a wind farm development will increase the number of roads and powerlines, will bring in invasive species that can ruin native grasslands, and negatively impact wildlife. The initial plan calls for 70 turbines, 120 metres high, with access roads to each and heavy cranes required for their installation. Some

Fringe area residents for many years."

The first goal of the ASP is "to minimize the continued fragmentation of higher-quality native rangeland and better agricultural land" within the Fringe. "Native rangeland is one of the rarest remaining landscapes in Canada." The second goal is to "minimize the construction of new roads" which accelerate fragmentation of the rangeland. One of the objectives is to "evaluate development proposals using sound ecological principles and processes.

Boileau assures people that a turbine only kills an average of 2 birds a year. But with 70 turbines, this could seriously impact populations of endangered raptors, such as the burrowing owl. The Grasslands Naturalists are researching the impact of wind farms in detail.

"Locating wind farms on internationally significant grasslands in the Cypress Hills does not represent sustainable green energy production,"

says grasslands expert and AWA Past-President Cliff Wallis, bluntly. He emphasizes that AWA is generally supportive of renewable energy developments as alternatives to fossil fuel production, but they must not damage environmentally sensitive lands, especially public lands.

"It's not as if we don't know what the effect will be," says Henry Binder, a semi-retired lawyer/rancher who owns land on the south side of the Park and a member of Grassland Naturalists. "We've seen the prairie landscape change every year with more and more development. Now wind energy is going to combine with coal bed methane to increase the degradation."

For such views, the environmental groups are being branded as hypocritical NIMBYists by Boileau, who is simply trying to discredit his opponents. Just like one of the lawyers from Pincher Creek who calls all those who don't want wind turbines "naysayers." Boileau thinks the only problem with wind farms is people – other people, that is. He has promised that all concerns will be addressed, but that doesn't mean to everyone's satisfaction. Osadczuk echoes Boileau's views and thwarts meaningful debate by trotting out the usual sweeping statement that "environmental groups oppose any kind of development."

Wallis points out that other companies are doing their homework and are not locating wind farms in sensitive native prairie and that this company can do the same. There is plenty of land in the county, he says, where the land is degraded and the biodiversity lost.

Brad Stelfox, a biologist and owner of environmental consulting firm Forem Technologies warns that Alberta's economic growth is proceeding at the expense of its natural landscapes and wildlife. Establishing roadless areas is critical to saving what natural habitat remains for wildlife, he says.

"You can't do everything everywhere," argues Wallis. "There are just some places we don't want to put things. For example, I have a toilet in my house, but I don't want it in my livingroom. You couldn't put a wind farm at Moraine Lake without huge protest. We think the Cypress Hills has those same values."

Viewscape Beauty

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," says Boileau, rather tritely. It's his standard response to all the people who tell him wind turbines, which he describes as "giant blooming daffodils," spoil the viewscape. But while many people think the turbines are ugly, who has ever thought the Cypress Hills are ugly?

"Even those who agree that wind turbines have a visual appeal similar to other well designed machines and weapons, recognize that turbines are not in harmony with the beauty of a natural landscape, by definition, if nothing else," says Binder. "Furthermore, wind turbines, improperly located, are a symbol of the destruction of what is natural."

The ASP emphasizes the importance of the viewscape, the extent to which people can see to the horizon in any direction standing in a specific location. "The expansive and relatively undeveloped views afforded by the Cypress Hills over the rolling prairie hinterland is a fundamental asset of Cypress Park." Retaining the status of existing nationally significant views from key viewpoints are deemed to be "a national heritage feature in the greater public interest. As a result, views should be a consideration in land use, subdivision and development approval processes."

Boileau downplays the importance of viewscape by saying things like "People don't like change, but our viewscapes are changing all the time (*Winnipeg Free Press*, March 5/05)." But even he admits that you can have so many turbines in an area that it would look too busy.

With Reeve Osadczuk claiming that "anything that makes money is beautiful," the councillors seem to be losing their vision and foresight that brought the ASP into being.

Binder is calling on the County to retain the vision of the Plan, the preservation of the unique and special features of the Cypress Hills, and to respect the lengthy public process that underlies it, especially in the face of pressures for intensive development. A Saskatchewan rancher with experience of a wind farm at Gull Lake told him that a wind farm "will solve your tourist problem."

Tourists come for the natural

C. Wallis

Cypress Hills view to Elkwater

C. Wallis

Northern fringe area of Cypress Hills

setting of the Cypress Hills, says Binder. But the "wow" factor will be lost as the landscape becomes more industrialized and the novelty of wind farms will quickly grow stale, especially as they become more common throughout southern Alberta. "In losing the ability to see the landscape as it once was, we also lose, what is for many, a strong impetus for appreciation and conservation of the natural world."

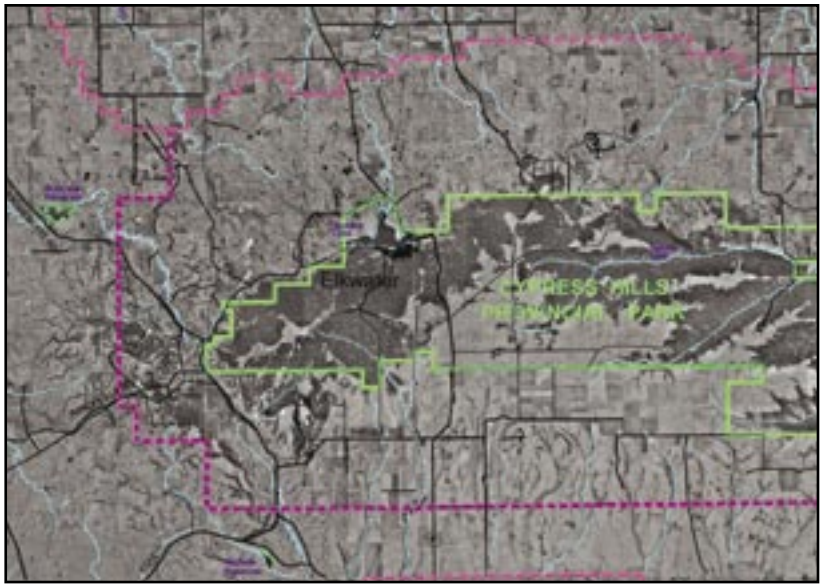
Because the wind farm developments will extend beyond the Fringe into the surrounding prairie, Binder pointed out to the County that wind farms outside the Fringe may be visible from viewpoints in the Park. "The Plan can only be meaningful if constraints are imposed outside the Fringe to ensure that the vision of the Plan with respect to viewscapes is protected."

Wayne Pedrini, the Area Manager with Community Development, reminded the Council of the Cypress Hills Dark-Sky Preserve that was officially designated in September 2004. Three government agencies, in partnership with the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, committed to a "cooperative and joint effort to assist with the protection of the night sky."

Boileau has already been to Canada Aviation over this issue. The general requirement is for red obstruction lighting for structures less than 150 m tall and that wind turbines should use a flashing red beacon. While reflectors may point most of the light towards the sky, Binder is concerned that the lights will still be visible from Park viewpoints. Boileau's parting suggestion was that people really have no business being at a Park lookout at night. Perhaps star-gazing isn't his thing, but many people enjoy marveling at the display of stars in a truly dark sky – and where better to do it than at a lookout.

Deciding the Dream

"Everyone is dreaming of having turbines on their property," says Binder, after a seminar by Boileau. Although Boileau gives the impression that wind farms are appropriate everywhere and doesn't discourage the dream of those who want turbines on their property, he knows that not every site is suitable. "High-high winds are no good and low-low winds are no good." He says he's found a wind river in the upper atmosphere over the fringe area where the wind blows more than 8 m/s.



Cypress Hills Provincial Park (green line) and surrounding Fringe area (pink/purple line). (Cypress Hills Fringe Area Structure Plan, May 2003)

As a landowner near the Park, Binder is well aware that his neighbours don't feel they can tell others what to do with their property. Some people are telling him, "I don't want these either, but why fight it; it's going to come here anyway?" It is a common sentiment among disillusioned people who haven't discovered the power of collective or community action.

Binder recognizes that wind farm developments are a community planning issue. There's also an issue of fairness. "People who don't want wind turbines on their property are not just jealous," he says. "They have the right to not have to experience the negative impacts of turbines." He explains that land values will increase on those properties with turbines, because of the income they bring in, but will decrease on neighbouring properties with degraded views.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development Minister Doug Horner has recently announced a plan to revitalize rural Alberta. A big part of that plan is tourism, which has a $1.7 billion potential in 10 years. "It's a sign of the times," says Horner (*Medicine Hat News* Feb. 26/05). "More tourists are looking for a rural holiday adventure." There are plans for huge growth in the area of farm tours with bed and breakfast houses and on-farm festivals, and enticing foreign tourists to non-typical areas of the province. The government is looking for ways, other than oil and gas and agriculture, to make rural communities sustainable over the long term.

Boileau thinks wind farms are a sustainable land use and could help preserve native prairie by giving cash strapped ranchers, caught in the BSE crisis, a source of income so they can retain their land. He has yet to make a formal application, but he admits he's considering operating right up to the Park boundary. In Ontario, he was looking for long-term leases on public lands and royalty holidays of 15 years.

The actual cost of wind farms is uncertain, but as Joe Eaton reminds us in "Killer Wind" *(Earth Island Journal*, Spring 2005), no energy source is without its costs and there are no risk-free options, but we should try to avoid environmental losses.

In addition to the environmental costs of poorly located wind farms, wind farms will not limit the amount of power generated by other means, says the Grasslands Naturalists. "Additional wind power will simply allow more relatively low cost power to be exported into electricity guzzling markets."

The only way for most wind farms in Canada to be viable is through funding from the federal government through the Federal Production Tax Credit and the Wind Power Production

Initiative (WPPI or "Wippi"). These developments must complete an Environmental Assessment as specified by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. AWA has asked the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to proceed with a comprehensive study of any of West WindEau's developments in southeastern Alberta as well as a formal public review.

"The global solution is to move towards putting rules in place that only permit or promote production of more "truly green" power," say the Grasslands Naturalists. There are many locations in the County, they say, for harnessing that truly green wind power. "There is no need, even for the development minded, to needlessly make sacrifices, especially of valuable features that make this corner of the Province an attractive place to live." They urge caution in making large environmental sacrifices for the wind industry.

While Elkwater has envisioned the future role of the townsite as a regional tourism destination centre since the 1980's, people like George Henline, of the Economic Development Alliance of Southeastern Alberta, talk about the rate of return on an acre and whether it is greater for wind power than other forms of land use. Binder says the County is overly concerned with economic development. "We already have economic development in the area – for tourism," he says. "Economic development should be a win/win situation. It shouldn't be necessary to destroy one feature for another."

It's doubtful if anyone would agree to putting a wind farm in a nationally significant viewscape if there were no money to be made from it. Some of the deeded land in the Fringe has conservation easements that do not allow wind farms. According to the ASP landowners can receive federal and provincial tax relief for protecting ecologically sensitive lands and most of the private lands within the Plan area that have not been cultivated, qualify. The program recognizes that the "best use" for some lands is to leave them in an undeveloped state. However, a rancher may also have a grazing lease on public land, for which there are no conservation easements.

Landowners can lease land to a wind farm developer for whatever terms they can negotiate. The question is whether ranchers should be allowed to collect revenue from wind farms on Crown grazing leases. There doesn't seem to be any precedent for ranchers being permitted to gain revenue from surface resource development on grazing leases. Government policy recognizes that lease land royalties rightfully belong to the public, and the benefits for surface development and sale of other surface resources, such as trees or gravel, are retained by the Crown. AWA is opposed to private interests benefiting from the destruction of the public native grasslands.

The Grasslands Naturalists believe that if ranchers don't get compensation "they would be united in opposition to such invasive developments and would be motivated to act in accordance with their image as good stewards of the land." They feel they are working in the long-term interest of the ranchers, not against their interests, by seeking protection of the land resource, as carefully thought out in the ASP. They point out that wind farm royalties would not be even a partial solution to the current problem of a depressed cattle market because it would affect only a small percentage of producers.

Not Alone

The Cypress County residents are not the only ones dealing with wind farm developments in native prairie landscapes. The Flint Hills Tallgrass Prairie Heritage Foundation, a coalition of ranchers and conservationists in Kansas, sought to block a large wind farm development on one of the few remaining stands of native tallgrass prairie and took the issue to court. In their complaint they sought to prohibit commercial wind energy development in the Flint Hills ecosystem and a surrounding buffer area to protect migratory birds and the aesthetic qualities of its views.

"If located in places like the cultivated landscapes of western Kansas, they would be much more environmentally friendly," said Ron Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas and a member of the Foundation. "But to destroy the last 4% of North America's tallgrass prairie seems like a crime – even though it is not against the law. There are many places where the wind blows but only one place where we have the largest expanse of native tallgrass prairie" (Associated Press, Jan. 26/05 and Feb.11/05). A federal judge dismissed the suit.

K. Morck

Sharp-tailed grouse

Visionary Citizens

"For the past 20 years the Cypress Hills Fringe area has been held up as the Canadian Pioneer in innovative protection of rare, native, shortgrass prairie while allowing well considered development near" the Park, says the ASP under a section entitled "A Future Vision."

"It is estimated that within the next 20 years, the majority of the fescue grasslands and the mixed-aspen montane outside the park will have been protected as unbroken ranchland for the long term. The price was some country residential uses concentrated into a relatively small footprint and located on less sensitive lands. This is the legacy of visionary citizens."

Those visionary citizens haven't disappeared. Hopefully, their voices and their legacy will prevail in the upcoming public hearing on the bylaw amendment.

FORT HILLS OIL SANDS VENTURE WILL DESTROY AN INTERNATIONAL TREASURE

By Shirley Bray

There's a lot of hype these days about Alberta's "treasure in the sand." That's the name of a Canada West Foundation report that touts the oil sands as the "future of Alberta's energy sector, and the cornerstone of its economic success." Meanwhile, the true gem in the oil sands stands on the brink of destruction once again. The McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC), one of the world's most spectacular wetlands will be destroyed if PetroCanada and UTS Energy Corp. go ahead with their plans for oil sands development in the Fort Hills Area.

"The proposed destruction of this internationally significant site is totally unacceptable," says Dr. Richard Thomas, a boreal expert and AWA's representative for the area. AWA strongly believes that MLWC is a priceless part of Canada's natural heritage and must be protected.

Located 90 km north of Fort McMurray, MLWC includes McClelland Lake, twelve sinkholes, and wetlands including a remarkably beautiful and intricate, ancient patterned fen on the west side of the lake. Patterned fens are uncommon in Alberta, comprising less than 5% of its peatlands and less than 1% of its land base, and McClelland has two of the largest.

Fens provide groundwater recharging, surface water filtration, and habitat for a diverse community of plant and animal species. The complex is home to numerous rare plants (including five insectivorous species) and is an important nesting and migratory stopover site for birds. The endangered whooping crane uses MLWC as a rest and refueling stop.

"This is the most extraordinary and spectacular patterned fen I have ever seen. It is a world-class site," says Dr. Diana Horton, a peatland expert at the University of Iowa who did her doctoral research at the University of Alberta.

R. Thomas

McClelland Fen today

V. Pharis

Syncrude oil sands operation

Under the EUB approved plan developed by TrueNorth Energy, which bowed out of the project in 2003, 40% of the fen is to be mined and 50% of MLWC will be directly destroyed. Their data showed that of the 2.8 billion barrels of oil available in the Fort Hills, a potential one billion barrels lie beneath the fen. That sounds like a lot, but represents only half a percent of the 2.5 trillion barrels of oil believed to be available in the oil sands.

In terms of projected future world oil demands, the amount of synthetic crude delivered by this project will be relatively insignificant. Furthermore, a recent Parkland Institute report notes that the government is generating more revenue from gambling than from royalties on the oil sands.

Senior representatives from PetroCanada's oil sands division, Ken Hall and Dennis Kohlman, met with AWA to discuss the project and AWA's concerns. They said PetroCanada bought in to the project knowing all the legal and regulatory approvals were in place. They have a solid drive to develop the resource, they said, but want to develop it as responsibly as possible and recognized the sensitivity of the area.

They are putting a lot of store by their "Sustainability Committee," a multistakeholder committee that has yet to be formalized, but would include stakeholders in the area, a representative from an environmental group and scientists. They are promoting a more open exchange of information and would like to develop a good working relationship with AWA and others.

"We want to work collaboratively with you," said Hall, noting that PetroCanada takes its reputation seriously.

While AWA acknowledges that PetroCanada is at least talking to people concerned about their project plans, something that many other companies would not do, ultimately AWA and PetroCanada have different goals. Collaboration that would inevitably lead to the destruction of MLWC is not an option.

The only hope discussed was that technology might improve enough in the next ten years, before their development date of about 2014, and that the resource might be taken and the fen spared. The fen is part of the 20%

of the Athabasca oil sands area that can be surface mined. "I have faith," said Kohlman, "that when it comes time to get these last reserves, there will be some way to protect that area."

Horton questions the technology fix. "No one can predict with certainty what the outcome would be, and this is a situation where we can't afford to do the experiment! Furthermore, if mining occurs in the west end of the fen, it will affect the hydrology of the fen, no matter what. The entire complex needs a significant buffer zone or any disturbance will destroy the ecological integrity of the site."

While the projected loss of this international treasure can be placed on the shoulders of government, there was no small influence from other sectors. Kohlman sat on the review committee that passed an amendment to the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for the area allowing mining in the McClelland Fen. He pointed out that a multistakeholder committee approved the IRP amendment, so clearly there was some will among a number of groups to go ahead. He puts a lot of faith in multistakeholder committees, believing that they prevent bad information from influencing decisions. But the IRP review process for MLWC is not a good example.

Under the original 1996 IRP for the sub-region, which took four years of considerable review and public input to hammer out, the McClelland Lake area was placed off-limits to mining. Under pressure from the Klein cabinet, however, it only took the Department of Sustainable Resource Development a mere four months to rush through an amendment to the IRP in 2002 that permitted mining to proceed. The government ignored its own review guidelines in the process.

"If we are going to change public policy it should be on the basis of due process, not on the basis of two-page response cards and written submissions that the public has limited time to prepare," wrote Gail MacCrimmon of the Pembina Institute in a backgrounder on the subject (April 8/02), referring to a survey in which people were asked to rate the importance of protecting wetlands versus contributing to economic growth.

"The government must base its decision using credible, scientifically-based research assessing the ecological uniqueness of the McClelland Fens and not just the potential economic value of the mineral resources beneath it," she added.

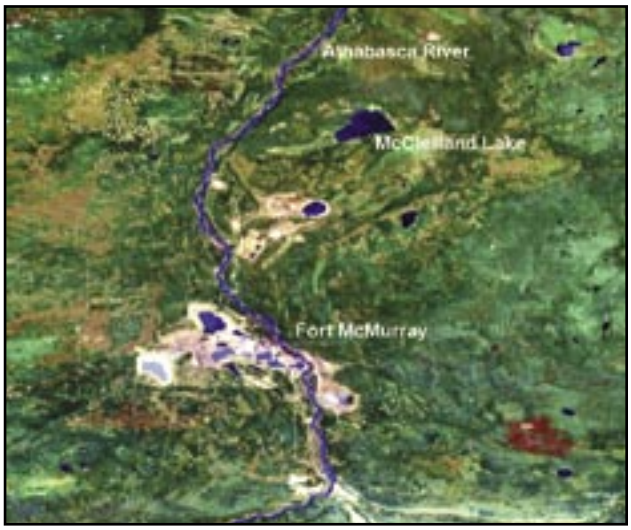
TrueNorth presented a report by peatland scientists as key evidence in support of its request for amendment of the IRP to allow mining in the fen. The report concluded that the McClelland Fen is merely "representative" and not unique. Horton criticized the report for its "fundamental problems with the methodology that render the conclusions invalid."

She pointed out that one of the authors earlier identified the fen as having "the most prominent...pattern in the province." The research group subsequently received a million dollar research grant from TrueNorth, which was suspended a year later when the company pulled out of the project.

At the EUB hearing in 2002 some oil sands executives suggested other companies would be interested in finding some avenue, such as lease trading, to prevent destruction of MLWC. That is the kind of collaborative effort that AWA would like to see proceed. In a world where the oil sands are now rated the biggest project in the world, currently valued at over $69 billion it is going to take courage for industry and government to look to the future.

"If they think about it at all, many people in our society seem to regard protecting the environment and maintaining current levels of biological diversity as an optional extra," says Thomas. "In fact, our survival as a species is utterly dependent upon the "ecological services" provided free by the naturally-functioning ecosystems comprising Earth's biosphere.

"Ecosystems consist of complex networks of intimately interlinked species. Ultimately, therefore, human well-being demands the maintenance of natural levels of biodiversity," he continues, pointing out that scientists rank the decline of biodiversity as one of the most serious global threats now facing humanity. "Against this backdrop, MLWC represents a small but significant cog in the worldwide 'wheel' of global biodiversity protection that must be saved."



Oil sands operations moving closer to McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (from DigitalGlobe, EarthSat, at maps.google.com)

Thomas emphasizes that we cannot replicate natural ecosystems, and that reclamation is NOT ecological restoration. "The claims by True North Energy and SRD at the 2002 EUB Hearings that mining half MLWC would not impair the ecological functioning of the Complex or McClelland Fen are utterly devoid of credibility," he says. No one could restore a patterned fen that took thousands of years to develop. Replacing it with a grassy meadow is a poor substitute for a site of international significance.

AWA wants the 164 km^2 site to be given protection as a provincial park, with the patterned fen (at its core) being designated as an ecological reserve. It is the only site in the area, apart from an already designated 4.3 km^2 Natural Area that AWA wants protected.

"Protecting the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex can be Alberta's 100th birthday gift to the world," says Thomas. "This wonderful place richly deserves World Heritage Site status. AWA will continue to fight hard for its complete protection."

V. Pharis

WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS RECOMMENDS CANADA PROTECT MORE BOREAL FOREST

The World Conservation Congress, held in November 2004, approved a resolution for Canada and Russia to strengthen their efforts to conserve boreal forest. There is a particular emphasis on large-scale conservation of boreal forest, which scientists are finding is critical to maintain present ecological values and services, through the establishment of protected areas as benchmarks, as well as the use of environmentally sustainable practices where industrial development does take place.

The resolution urges Canada and Russia to "recognize, preserve and protect ecological processes through which the overall health of boreal forest regions have been sustained, using community-based and ecosystem-based land use planning, especially before tenure allocation, to maintain forest health structure, ecological functions, compositions and biodiversity, carbon reservoirs, and indigenous cultural values over the long term."

The resolution also supports continuing research and funding, the development of innovative polices and practices, restoration of areas impacted by industry, the involvement of indigenous and local communities, land managers and others to "encourage the effective management of boreal forests and their protected areas." It emphasizes incorporating scientific and indigenous knowledge, and public perspectives in ecologically based land use planning to help achieve the conservation of natural and cultural values.

Canada and Russia contain most of the world's boreal forest regions in the northern hemisphere. The resolution recognizes the importance of the boreal ecosystem for its freshwater; its unparalleled carbon storing capacity in trees, soil and peat; its rich array of wildlife; and its cultural significance to indigenous peoples. It points out that much of boreal forest is publicly owned and that land use planning should precede allocation of industrial uses and new roads.

In December 2003 the Canadian Boreal Initiative released an ambitious plan, *The Boreal Forest Conservation Framework,* which promotes a conservation approach for the entire boreal. The goal of the Framework is "to conserve the cultural, sustainable economic and natural values of the entire Canadian boreal region by employing the principles of conservation biology to protect at least 50% of the region in a network of large interconnected protected areas, and support sustainable communities, world-leading ecosystem-based resource management practices and state-of-the-art stewardship practices in the remaining landscape."

A new report sponsored by the Wildlands League details viable alternatives to clearcutting in the boreal. Written by forestry professor Andrew Park of the University of Winnipeg and his colleagues, *A Cut Above: Alternatives to Clearcutting in Canada's Boreal Forest* represents the first systematic assessment of alternative approaches to clearcutting in Canada's boreal region that would maintain critical ecological elements of the forest such as old trees and species diversity. The report also discusses the economics of alternative approaches, concluding that in some cases, there would be immediate cost savings for the forest industry.

Among the alternatives recommended in the report for Canada's boreal forests are the protection of seedlings and young trees during logging; staged approaches to canopy removal known as "shelterwood logging"; and the removal of individual trees and groups of trees, called "selection logging," a practice that is more common in Canada's southern forests.

What the Raven Saw – Woodland Caribou
© Deidre E. Webb

PASSION OF PERSEVERING ADVOCATES CRITICAL TO CASTLE'S FUTURE

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

Klaus Jericho first fell in love with the Castle Wilderness in southwestern Alberta in 1969. It was the first land attachment in his life. "I identified my being with the Castle," he says. "It became my personal venture; I felt that it was so important to protect the area for the benefit of the land." He first became involved in the campaign to protect the Castle to try to make people realize what treasures there were in the Castle. "You can't overemphasize the importance of these treasures globally."

Reg Ernst is a botanist who has been studying the Castle for ten years. "To appreciate the value of the Castle area, you just need to look at a map," he points out. "It's a pinch point: if you have a damaged Castle, then you have isolated the species – animals or plants – to the north of the Castle from those in the south. The whole concept of the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) eco-region is dependent on a healthy Castle. If we lose the Castle, it will have an impact on the whole of the Rockies in the northern U.S. and southern Canada, and the continuity between the two for large carnivores will be lost."

Dave Sheppard, a long-time advocate for the Castle, agrees and points to the importance of the Castle as an area where the broad sweeping prairies bump into subalpine forests, open montane landscapes, and spectacular alpine peaks. "The canyons along the front ranges are really special to me," says Sheppard. "The proximity of the prairies and the mountains is the most striking thing. When you get up high, you can look back over the prairies and there is nowhere where it is easier to imagine what it would have looked like a hundred years ago."

But industry has taken its toll on the area, with crisscrossing roads and seismic lines, sour gas wells, compressors, and concrete barriers reminiscent of the abandoned bunkers on the beaches of Dieppe. Even in places where the landscape can't tolerate the incursion, industry and recreationists have invaded the Castle. "If we don't continue to work for strengthened protection in the Castle," says AWA board member Vivian Pharis, "the world will be left with another hole in an increasingly ragged jigsaw puzzle that is our natural heritage."

Working toward effective protection in the Castle has seemed like a thankless task at times. "Some progress has been made in the Castle in the past five years or so, but this has been more to do with local administration than any overall government philosophy," says Ernst. "At the local level, staff are doing the best they can, but the government in Edmonton just refuses to see the big picture."

Jericho echoes this point of view. "I can't overemphasize the need for long-term vision. The people making the decisions just don't seem to have that long-term perspective. Will it be too late by the time we realize what we

C.Olson

Spionkop Canyon in Castle Wildland

*The rare red monkey flower (*Minimulus lewisii *Pursh)*

C.Olson

Brian Horejsi's association with the Castle goes back even further. "I've been going to the Castle for more than half a century. I first went to the Castle as a kid to pick huckleberries and to fish for bull trout. It was part of my back yard." Horejsi is a wildlife scientist who also recognizes the importance of valuing the Castle on a more fundamental level: "We need people who aren't afraid to show an emotional attachment to an area. That's part of being honest and effective citizens. We need people with the close emotional attachment; it's what keeps us going."

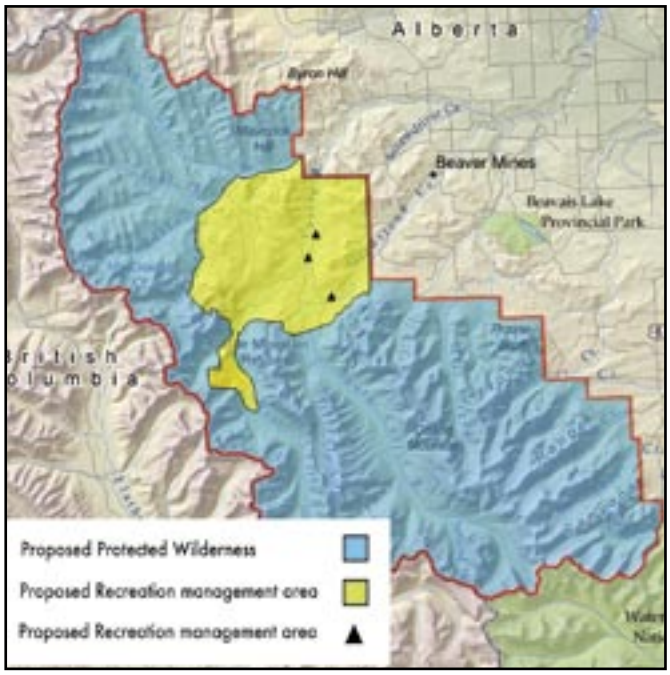
For decades the Castle Wilderness has attracted people who are passionate about this land of broad sweeping valleys, roaring streams, high alpine lakes, canyons filled with elusive wildlife and flora and fauna that takes your breath away. They have been willing, in spite of numerous setbacks, obstacles, and bitter battles, to dedicate a significant amount of time and energy for its conservation.

have done?"

Horejsi sees it now as representative of the battle between the public and special interests. "It's a battle over freedom and democracy. Every time I go, I see the absence of public interest in its management. I go to the Castle despite its fragile and degraded state, but we still have the chance to do something decent. People are going to have to get aggressive: there is not much room for saying, 'Well that's just the way things are.'"

Ernst does see some cause for cautious optimism. "In the past few years, some of the more fragile areas such as the South Castle valley have been closed to OHV access, which is positive. If we close some of these areas to motorized and industrial access today, then in 10, 15, 30 years, a lot of the area would heal itself. If you look at Red Rock Canyon Trail in Waterton National Park, I remember driving that road in the 1970s. Now you would never know it used to be a vehicle trail. But however much these areas heal, non-native plants will always be a big problem."

Some individuals have burned themselves out fighting to keep this place wild, but their vision is not lost. Others continue the struggle, advocating for better management and greater protection. "The perseverance of people such as Gord Peterson, James Tweedie, and Judy Huntley [of the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition] against all odds is heart-warming," says Jericho.



Map of the proposed Castle Wildland

The groups working for this vision remain steadfast and committed. AWA has its roots in this area and is joined by Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition, CPAWS, Chinook Sierra Club Chapter, Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative, Wildcanada.net, and the National Resource Defence Council of the U.S. Together we are a strong force and we are continuing to push for the vision. We have been meeting on a regular basis throughout the past several months, creatively seeking alternative ways of helping the public and the government to know and understand the values of the Castle.

To this end, a map has been produced by the groups to show the area that must be given greater protection than that of a basic Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) and to identify areas requiring strict management practices. The privilege that users of this area have enjoyed at all levels must be acknowledged. Life-cycle planning for oil and gas operations that demands the highest possible standards for practice today and clear commitments to restoration is critical. No further industrial scale logging in this area can be tolerated; the security of our watershed depends on it. Off-trail access by motorized vehicles must desist and cattle grazing into the alpine must cease.

The individuals and the groups who are committed to the vision of the Castle won't give up.

"It's important to keep up the fight," stresses Jericho. "We may get weary of playing the same record, and it's important to get new people to keep up the fight, but trying is important. Though you might not reach your goal, you do reach other goals along the way and it does make a difference."

(AWA's work in the Castle is supported by the Wilburforce Foundation.)

FIRE MANAGEMENT PLANS BLAZE OUT OF CONTROL IN BIGHORN

By Lara Smandych, AWA Conservation Biologist

The risk of wildfire in Alberta has prompted the government to plan and implement fire control initiatives to prevent loss to the province's communities that live on the edge of wild lands. Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) for the Clearwater Forest Area is proposing a mitigation plan to harvest more than 280 hectares of additional forest to reduce the risk of wildfire to the town of Nordegg. But will this clearing really serve to protect the community?

Forested and wildland areas are attractive places to live and work. Recent trends show people shifting from urban centers into these interface communities. As a result, forest

protection has shifted its focus to community protection to avert fire. One could ask why nature should be destroyed in order to protect landowners who have chosen to live in these interface communities.

The FireSmart program is a fire management initiative used to reduce and prevent losses due to fire and to enhance safety in interface communities.

In 2003 the large fires in the Crowsnest Pass and area prompted Alberta Public Lands and Forest Division (SRD) to take a new look at their fire prevention strategy. The result was the Nordegg FireSmart Community Zone Plan. In Alberta, Nordegg ranked among the top six communities as having high priority for FireSmart planning and mitigation.

V. Pharis

A recent fire in the Bighorn area leaves scorched trees standing amid the burned remains of underbrush

Interface FireSmart fire management focuses on steps that can be taken to reduce the threat of fire to interface communities. These initiatives concentrate on fuel management and include activities such as the removal of shrubs and deadfall, the thinning and removal of trees, and the use of fire-retardant building materials to prevent the spread of fire.

For Nordegg, however, the concept of community fire control has become a broad regional initiative, penetrating deep into surrounding forest and wildland with the goal of creating primary and secondary fire containment lines. The planning area is extensive and stretches beyond the Nordegg townsite and subdivisions into the Bighorn First Nation and Bighorn Canyon Development Nodes. No harvesting under this plan will occur within the boundary of the Bighorn Wildland. Under Nordegg's FireSmart plan, approximately 280 ha have been identified for commercial harvesting using patch cut, stand conversion, and clear cut methods. An additional 60 ha will experience mechanical fuel reduction in the name of fire control.

Why is such a large and intrusive harvesting plan needed for the area, particularly when other initiatives have already been undertaken in and around Nordegg resulting in the removal or alteration of more than 440 ha of forest and wildland?

Fire in the Bighorn region has been strictly suppressed since the 1950s. Unfavourable results of fire suppression include the aging of forests, a higher canopy density, and the accumulations of biomass on the forest floor. In January 2005, *Canadian Geographic* reported that more than 450,000 ha of forest are consumed by fire every year in neighbouring Saskatchewan, while Alberta allows less than 200,000 ha to burn annually. This level of human fire suppression has had the opposite effect in that it has created the perfect environment for wildfires and the urgent need for fire control and community protection.

SRD has a history of unproven fire management in the area. In 1999 fire management for Nordegg saw the development of the Nordegg Wildland Urban Interface Plan in recognition that fire could significantly impact the health and safety of the community. A total of 34 ha of forest were thinned and pruned, and had deadfall removed around the north subdivision of the community. SRD admitted that these efforts would do little to hinder approaching fires from adjacent area.

The threat and impact of wildfire on other interface communities in Alberta in 2001 accelerated SRD's need for a larger scale fuel reduction plan for Nordegg. By 2003, under the new Nordegg Fuel Reduction Harvest Plan (Harvest Plan), an additional 410 ha of commercial partial-cut harvesting was undertaken. SRD readily admits, however, that they were not happy with the overall results of the Harvest Plan. Among the unforeseen problems were the following:

- cleared forest blocks were bigger than they needed to be,
- tree blowdowns occurred and deadfall logging was required,
- tree species died and contributed to the increase in fuel load, and
- SRD did not have a full-time role in clearing inspection and sequencing supervision.

By the time these problems were realized, four large blocks of forest located both east and west of the Forestry Trunk Road had already been cleared. These blocks were not contiguous and would do little to prevent risk of fire. Furthermore, as one member of AWA observed, the resulting landscape around Nordegg is a mess and is becoming an eyesore.

Despite these poor results and many people in and around the community of Nordegg remaining skeptical about further fire-control efforts, the new FireSmart plans were developed. Will these plans be effective in protecting the Nordegg community? Do other less intrusive and extensive options exist to abate wildfire threats?

"Until they show me the need for these plans, I am not convinced SRD needs to do anything beyond what they've already done for fire control within the community," says Martha Kostuch, a Rocky Mountain House veterinarian and president of Alberta League for Environmentally Responsible Tourism (ALERT). "It may be a gut reaction to fires in Alberta

and B.C. and the criticism they [SRD] haven't done enough."

Kostuch is not convinced that in a particularly bad fire season the proposed clearing will provide enough resistance to wildfire and believes that evacuations will be inevitable. SRD acknowledges that this plan will not serve to stop a large fire but would only reduce its intensity for better control.

In the end, forest clearing may not address the potential for fire, as harvesting may leave the area in a flammable state given the degree of fire suppression. Although we can try to prevent the severity of fires, inevitably they will continue to threaten forests and neighbouring communities due in part to the persistence of hot, dry summers. Research has shown that forest clearing can have many negative impacts on the forest and wildland ecosystem. These include accelerated and increased levels of erosion, the increase of invasive species, increased recreational access, increased predation of wildlife, and irreparable damage from clearing techniques to the soil structure.

SRD needs to consider other fire management tools available to address interface-community fire control. Among these is prescribed burning. Prescribed burning has become an accepted ecosystem-management activity (Biswell 1994). Prescribed burns may, in fact, act as a fire break that keeps fire near the ground where it is less intense and more accessible for control.

Research by the United States Forest Service promotes the effective, although risky, prescribed burn, given the controversy that often comes with clearcutting options. Ben Gadd also questioned the effectiveness of forest clearing on community protection for Jasper (see *WLA* April 2004). He too proposed prescribed burning of the forest in and around Jasper as an alternative to planned clearing activities. In 2003, the B.C. Minister of Forests also echoed the return of prescribed burns.

In contrast, SRD's plans to clear trees and remove fuel from the forest floor may serve to keep the fire ablaze in the canopy where it is difficult to control. Prescribed burns don't come without impacts to the community, however: primarily, air quality issues due to smoke. Special management attention is required as to the timing of these burns and their impact on sensitive species.

Given the undesirable outcomes of clearing and the first phase of logging initiatives in the area, SRD has not proven the need or benefit for such drastic harvesting measures. Further logging should not proceed until the effectiveness and overall need for fire abatement activities is adequately assessed and addressed.

SRD needs to manage the forest for social and environmental values. Management and protection of wildlife and their supporting habitat needs to be a top priority. "If a need for this activity is identified, then what is the best way to undertake these actions in order to address and manage for all values and benefits while minimizing negative impacts?" asks Kostuch.

Given the extent of this plan, could timber supply and salvage be driving forces behind this initiative? Could this new plan simply be an excuse to log timber resources? Public and community safety must be a priority; however, fire suppression initiatives that serve simply to preserve and supply timber to operators cannot be supported.

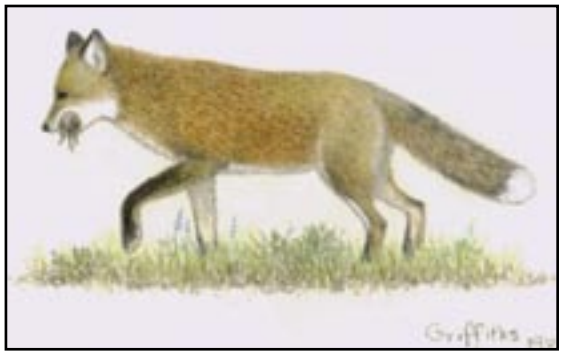
"The plan may seem extensive but we have a lot invested in Nordegg," says Clearwater County Manager Brian Irmen. "Council feels something significant needs to done to protect the community. It won't take long for the scar on the landscape to heal. We would rather take the scar than risk loss to the community."

SRD has repeatedly failed their public consultation obligations by not consulting all stakeholders on issues at the outset, and despite being chastised in court over poor public consultation in the Bar C logging case in the Ghost River area, SRD has once again fallen short. Although public open houses were held and the draft presented to Clearwater County Council in October 2004, SRD said that the omission of representation by environmental groups on the FireSmart committee was an oversight and they issued an apology. After providing this excuse, they offered AWA an opportunity to comment on the final draft. AWA expects that all stakeholders and interested parties have equal opportunity to review the draft plans and that adequate consultation be provided through the entire process.

Although the public consultation process has yet to be completed, I was informed by SRD that the fire plan was basically a "done deal" and would be going through. Yet, according to a letter sent to AWA by SRD, the plan is still in draft stage and implementation will not commence until the plan is endorsed by Fish and Wildlife and Clearwater County. Harvesting operations will not proceed until late fall 2005 and will be completed by spring.

Despite the planned intervention, the community of Nordegg and area may be left vulnerable to future fire catastrophe. Given that 40 per cent of wildfires in Alberta are caused by human activity, SRD needs to concentrate its efforts on community fire-risk education, fire preparedness and emergency management, in addition to forest-user education and training in attempts to minimize potential future risk. More resources should also be directed toward other processes such as fire fighting personnel and infrastructure.

Further questions or concerns regarding wildfire threat mitigation in Bighorn and area should be addressed to Gary Mandrusiak, Wildfire Prevention Officer, Sustainable Resource Development, Clearwater Forest area (403) 845-8356.



Red Fox
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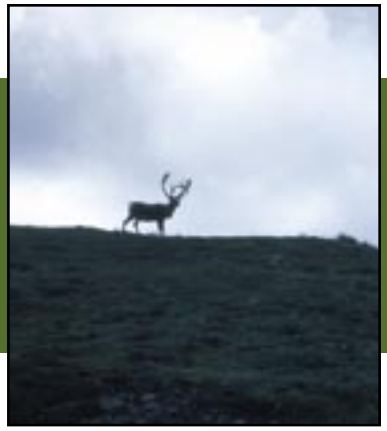


R.Sloan

THE CARIBOU DILEMMA: GOVERNMENT STRUGGLES WITH WOODLAND CARIBOU FILE WHILE INDUSTRY FLOURISHES

By Lara Smandych, AWA Conservation Biologist

A lone caribou is silhouetted against the morning sky

In a meeting with environmental groups in February, Assistant Deputy Minister of Fish and Wildlife Ken Ambrock admitted, "The caribou file is the most complex species file right now. We struggle on this file." By "struggle," Ambrock means that although the department is concerned about caribou, the required decisions are complicated by ongoing industrial development. It is a clash of values: the future of Alberta's threatened caribou herds versus the "Alberta Advantage."

At the meeting, AWA had the opportunity to discuss the protection of caribou populations and habitat, and their recovery. AWA and other groups stressed that a strong policy commitment is required by government. Such a statement is what many in industry tell us they have been wanting and waiting for: a policy to help direct the activities of industry within caribou ranges.

"We need across the board agreement on the caribou policy," says Ambrock, referring in particular to the Departments of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) and Energy. Despite a request from AWA, the Department of Energy has not yet scheduled a meeting with us to discuss caribou issues.

While we wait for agreement among government departments, industry continues to race ahead with new developments within caribou range. Industry may seem even more eager these days as we continue to wait for the release of recommendations from the Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan). Environmental groups anticipate the release of the Recovery Plan by Minister of SRD David Coutts within the next month. The possible outcomes from the Recovery Plan are encouraging, particularly when the Minister stated in a letter to AWA, "I do realize that time is of the essence with respect to moving forward on caribou recovery actions."

Companies profiting from the delay in the release of the Recovery Plan include Suncor Energy and Talisman Energy. Talisman plans to build a 70-km pipeline through the ranges of the RedRock/Prairie Creek and A la Peche caribou herds in the spring of 2005. AWA requested that the company defer this project until the release of the Recovery Plan due to the risk placed on these animals. In a nutshell, Talisman made it clear that science falls short and even they are "not intelligent enough" to know the impact industry has on these ranges.

What this seems to mean is that "science has not yet implicated industry in the decline of the caribou within this region – therefore we still have the green light to proceed." In any case, the deficiency of information should trigger the precautionary principle, especially when the survival of a highly sensitive species is at stake. Although science may not yet dictate that industry should not be in the range, neither does it imply that industry should operate there.

The Recovery Plan, which is just an advisory document, is lagging behind the industrial activity on the ground and this may impact decisions the government makes. How strong will the government's commitment to caribou be? How far will they go to recover their populations and habitat? Most importantly, will they declare that caribou are important enough to defer oil and gas and other industrial developments within caribou ranges: that is, can caribou become an integral component of the Alberta Advantage?

While some companies continue to ignore the plight of the caribou, at least one company is making a surprise move on the caribou front. Starting in the 2005-2006 winter season, Canadian Forest Products (Canfor) announced they will defer harvesting and road construction for two years within the range of the Little Smoky caribou herd range. This deferral will constitute approximately one-sixth of their Forest Management Area (FMA), or 250,000 cubic meters of timber. This voluntary delay in activity is intended to give the Alberta government time to adopt and implement recommendations from the Recovery Plan. This initiative follows in the footsteps of Weyerhaeuser, who have also elected to defer harvest in a portion of their FMA within the Narraway and RedRock/Prairie Creek caribou herd ranges until 2009.

In the end, it seems the fate of the caribou rests largely in the hands of the provincial government. Ambrock suggested that if stakeholders come to government with a common position on caribou, such an alliance would make government's job much easier. A common or shared vision for caribou management may be difficult to achieve, given the pressure and intensity of industrial development in Alberta. However, Ambrock suggests, "a common vision for everyone must be a healthy landscape." He adds, "But we're not doing a good job at getting it done."

To begin formulating this common position, AWA supports the establishment of a provincial multi-stakeholder caribou committee (PCC)

to manage Alberta's remaining caribou herds.

To be effective, a common position must include: a) a long-term commitment to the protection of a portion of caribou ranges, b) the implementation of caribou habitat restoration activities, c) deferral of industrial activities while range assessments and restoration is undertaken, d) integrated access management planning, and e) no new activity allocations.

In a letter, Minister Coutts said that his announcement on the Recovery Plan would include recommendations regarding the establishment of a single provincial caribou committee. He also asked for continued patience on the matter.

We must continue to move forward if we are to conserve Alberta's remaining caribou herds, and we need to consider our choices carefully. "Industry committed to reducing their footprint a decade ago, but it's not happening," says Cliff Wallis, past-president of AWA. "In the end we need wilderness protected from industry. We need to make a choice."

THE DOLLARS AND SENSE OF PRIMROSE-LAKELAND

By Ian Urquhart

A frustrating aspect of protected areas campaigns is the perennial tendency for protection's opponents to wage their campaigns on the landscape occupied by one or another incarnation of the Almighty Dollar. Invariably, wilderness protected areas proposals are criticized for the economic damage they may cause. Such criticism often arises in rural Alberta. In large part, it arises because, as the MLA Steering Committee Report on Rural Development reported last year (the Griffiths Report), the viability of many of our rural communities is threatened.

The threats may appear as a declining/aging population, as incomes that are markedly lower than those of the city, or as economic growth rates that lag behind those of larger, more urban centres. Whatever shape it assumes, the threat to the future of rural communities feeds criticism of conservation proposals. This criticism is magnified when rural Albertans feel that they, not their big city cousins, disproportionately bear the costs of environmental stewardship.

What do these economic dimensions of and perspectives on today's rural Alberta mean for the Primrose-Lakeland campaign? I would suggest they mean that if we want to build local support in communities such as Lac La Biche for our conservation objectives, we must find ways of marrying conservation to economic growth and diversification in rural Alberta.

The potential of eco- or nature-related tourism ventures in the Lakeland area should figure prominently in this approach. Nature-related tourism remains one of the strongest growth segments in the global tourism business. It is tourism that, if carried out responsibly, can inject genuine meaning into the concept of sustainable development. It is tourism that also has been shown to be more appealing when it is conducted in protected areas.

There would seem to be latent support for this type of tourism in rural Alberta generally, and in the Lakeland area in particular. The Griffiths Report, for example, noted that "many rural Albertans see environmentalism as an opportunity for economic growth, for example through eco-tourism and alternate energy production." In the Lakeland area, the Lac La Biche Community Futures Centre has identified two prime examples of nature-related tourism, birding and canoeing, as part of Lakeland's "industry of the future."

The Lac La Biche Historical Mission Society also appears to be interested in promoting this type of tourism. Tourism data, such as those gathered by Environment Canada in 1996, may be used to strengthen this developing rural interest in nature-related tourism. Then Albertans spent $1.2 billion on these activities, including more than $171 million on wildlife viewing.

R. Thomas

Aerial view of Lakeland

The recognition by the provincial government that tourism, particularly nature-related tourism, has an important role to play in the economic revitalization of rural Alberta fits well with what I hope will become a successful strategy in our Primrose-Lakeland campaign.

(AWA's work in Primrose-Lakeland is supported by the Richard Ivey Foundation.)

CHEVIOT MINE IN OPERATION WITH COURT CASES IN TOW

By Lara Smandych, AWA Conservation Biologist

While Elk Valley Coal (EVC) mining trucks have begun hauling coal from the Cheviot Creek Pit area, a federal judicial review filed by Sierra Legal Defence Fund (SLDF) on behalf of environmental groups, including AWA, has taken a new turn.

In February, lawyers for Cardinal River Coal (CRC) served a Notice of Constitutional Question challenging the constitutional validity of the sections of the Migratory Bird Regulations that we rely on in our argument. CRC counsil intends to argue that the sections are beyond federal government powers.

In 2004 the ENGO coalition launched a legal challenge that included the argument that the federal government authorization of the Cheviot Creek Development (first phase of mine development) contravenes the Federal Migratory Bird Convention Act and regulations made under it designed to protect migratory bird habitat. SLDF lawyers argue that the authorization of activity will result in the destruction of sensitive migratory bird habitat and is therefore illegal.

"A constitutional challenge is really saying 'when you look at the list of things the feds have power over under the constitution, migratory birds are not on it,'" says SLDF lawyer, Tim Howard. "Our argument says that the federal government does have that power because, among others, it can regulate issues of national concern like the loss of transboundary bird species."

CRC argues that the regulations prohibiting the destruction of migratory bird habitat, including waters used by migratory birds, interferes with Alberta's ability to regulate provincial lands and wildlife. This argument implies that the protection of migratory bird habitat is not an issue of sufficient national importance to make it something the federal government would regulate.

"The proper implementation of the Act is essential to the protection of migratory birds and their habitat. If you can't protect where a species lives, you won't have any species to conserve," says Howard. "The protection of migratory birds is a federal matter of national concern requiring federal leadership, not a piecemeal provincial approach."

The Migratory Bird Convention Act is a critical piece of legislation. Rather than challenging our case, CRC should re-evaluate their project and accommodate these important and sensitive birds. This may show CRC to be a better corporate citizen.

The first phase of the judicial review is scheduled to begin on June 14, 2005 in Edmonton.

On April 8, 2005, the Minister of Environment, Mr. Guy Boutilier, approved recommendations made by the Alberta Environmental Appeals Board (AEAB). The AEAB determined that some aspects of the new design of the Cheviot mine haul road negatively affect Mr. Ben Gadd in terms of the use and enjoyment of the local wilderness areas and that the impacts of the new Cheviot mine project in many cases, are different from those of the original project.

The AEAB stated that, in many instances, the Environment Director did not have all the relevant information needed to make a proper decision for the approval of the application. Furthermore, the AEAB identified that this is the first approval that has come before them where the assessment of impacts and design of mitigation measures were not done prior to the approval.

In many instances, the impacts from the new haul road were found to be more severe and some still unknown due to lack of information and assessment. For example, in regards to wildlife impact, the AEAB believes the haul road has "changed the impact on grizzly bears and other wildlife from those identified in the original design."

Many conditions and recommendations have been attached to the approval given to the mine company. These include:

- The company must report any wildlife mortalities in relation to haul road within 24 hours of the occurrence and make recommendations for avoiding future mortalities.
- Inform affected public twice a year about he mine's mitigation measures of environmental impacts.
- No use of salt on roads without written permission by Director of Environmental. Requests for use must be accompanied by an analysis of the impacts of salt on wildlife.

L. Smandych

Haulroad to Cheviot Mine

The issue remains however, who will monitor the company to ensure compliance.

To review the complete report, see http://www3.gov.ab.ca/eab/dec/03-150-152-R.pdf

ALBERTA REFUSES TO SIGN CANADA FOREST ACCORD

By Shirley Bray

Alberta and Quebec are the only two Canadian jurisdictions that have refused to sign the *Canada Forest Accord 2003-2008*. Alberta was noticeably absent at the annual meeting of the National Forest Strategy Coalition (NFSC) in early March.

Representatives of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development told AWA in a meeting in March 2005 that they could not agree with some of the wording. AWA Past-president Cliff Wallis advised them that AWA did not agree with all of the Accord either, but that we did agree with the principle, and he encouraged the government to sign on.

"We are optimistic that Alberta will reconsider its position and sign on to this important forest strategy," says Wallis. "Failure to commit to the *National Forest Strategy* will continue to endanger Alberta's forests and be a disservice to the millions of Albertans who want to see natural ecosystems and wildlife adequately protected."

The NFSC describes the *Accord* as "a formal commitment among diverse groups with different perspectives and objectives to work together on a solution to the challenges facing our forest, while using the *National Forest Strategy* (NFS) as the reference document."

More than 60 aboriginal, industry, government, and environmental organizations have signed this third *Accord* so far. It commits signatories to maintain Canada's forest health for the benefit of all living things and for the social, cultural, environmental, and economic well-being of all Canadians.

The 2003–2008 NFS is the fifth in a line of forest strategies dating back to 1981 that outline broad goals and objectives for the forest sector in Canada. The NFSC, composed of governmental and non-governmental organizations, was formed by the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers in 1992 to oversee the implementation of the strategies.

The NFS is a consensus document developed with extensive consultation with the broad forest community, but its implementation is voluntary. The current NFS is the first one that has been developed with the active involvement of major environmental groups.

Two of the principles of the *Accord* that deal with public involvement are:

(1) Comprehensive information about the state of the forest and the social well-being, environmental services, and economic wealth that are derived from forest conservation and use must be available publicly.

(2) As stewards of forest heritage, Canadians continually seek: to improve the quality of information, public involvement, and reporting; to promote the public accountability of all those involved in forest conservation and use; and to communicate their vision, goals, and results.

Specific commitments of the NFS include:

(1) Ecosystem-based management of natural forests including:

- integrated land use planning before tenure allocations;
- maintaining natural forested ecosystems;
- completing a representative system of protected areas; and
- conserving old-growth forests and threatened forest ecosystems.

(2) Adopting policies and actions that support forest-based community sustainability.

(3) Accommodating aboriginal and treaty rights in the sustainable use of the forest.

Environmental groups recognize that the 2003–2008 NFS is a significant improvement over past strategies, but are concerned that because the commitments are not legally binding they may not be followed up with action.

"Ultimately it is just words on paper unless there is the political will from government, industry and all stakeholders to move towards the implementation for the Strategy's objectives, through policy reform and improved on-the-ground management practices," says Sierra Club's Rachel Plotkin. "Political will is fuelled by the public," she adds.

C. Brunn

Scientist Loys Maingon, in a review of a draft of the NFS, noted that "although it claims to formulate a forest strategy based on the best available science, [the NFS] is primarily an economic and political document in which science plays a tertiary role, although science is claimed to be the guiding principle" (Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists Newsletter, Fall 2003).

The current model used for forest management, sustainable yield, will not maintain sustainable forests, he says. "The model should be a transition to increased agroforestry to meet wood resource needs, and the creation of vast interconnected biotic reserves to maintain ecosystem services and biodiversity."

HOW MUCH POLITICKING WENT INTO GRIZZLY HUNT DECISION?

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

The grizzly bear hunt has certainly roused the passions of people both for and against it. While the Alberta Fish and Game Association are for the hunt, claiming science is on their side, an authoritative group of scientists wants it stopped. But the hunt is going ahead as planned. No surprise, then, that Ron Millson, Head of Wildlife Allocation and Use at Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) and one of the senior staff who advised going ahead with the hunt, admitted that no decision is made without politics.

April 1 (appropriately enough) marks the beginning of the 2005 spring grizzly bear hunt. Licences will be issued to allow 73 hunters the opportunity to hunt grizzlies between April 1 and May 31. Meanwhile, the evidence mounts that Alberta's grizzly bear population continues to struggle.

"Most knowledgeable scientists will agree that the grizzly bear in Alberta is on a slow slide to extinction," says Dr. Paul Paquet, director of the Eastern Slopes Grizzly Bear Project. Dr. Paquet is one of a group of scientists, including Dr. Stephen Herrero, Dr. David Suzuki, and Killam Award-winner Dr. David Schindler, who released a letter in March 2005 urging the Alberta government to list the grizzly bear as a "threatened" species under the province's Wildlife Act.

"If the government wants to reverse this trend, they need to sincerely and effectively control human activity that threatens bears, protect grizzly bear habitat vital to the species survival, and stop the hunt," says the letter. The scientists' voice is added to that of the provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Team and the government's Endangered Species Conservation Committee, which have both recommended an immediate suspension of the hunt.

In February 2005, the Eastern Slopes Grizzly Bear Project issued a report summarizing its nine-year study into grizzly bears in the Banff National Park/Kananaskis Country area. One important aspect of grizzly bear biology highlighted in this report is the surprisingly low productivity of bears in the region. Females produced their first surviving litter at an average 8.4 years. Litters averaged 1.84 cubs, with an interval of 4.4 years between litters. This is a low rate of productivity by any standard, reinforcing the importance of keeping mortality of bears, particularly females, as low as possible.

But the report also found that 75 per cent of female deaths and 86 per cent of male deaths were human-caused. Of the 18 grizzly bears that were removed from the population during the study, only three died of natural causes. Four were legally killed, two were illegally killed, two were shot in self defence, two died in transportation-related accidents, and three were killed as "nuisance" bears. Two other "nuisance" bears were captured and removed from the population.

While the science continues to point to a struggling grizzly population in Alberta, the justification for the grizzly hunt becomes more and more peculiar. The Web site for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) lists a number of reasons for continuing with the grizzly hunt. These range from the supportable ("There is a long-standing hunting tradition and a high demand"); to the scientifically insupportable ("The population growth rate is potentially increased by harvest of adult males that kill and eat young grizzlies"); to the faintly ridiculous ("Hunting harvest provides information about bears" and "Hunting maintains a knowledgeable group of people who are strong advocates for Alberta's grizzly population").

N. Douglas

A female grizzly and two cubs on the railway line outside Lake Louise

"Bear hunters want direct experience of nature because they see life as an adventure," writes Barry Cooper of the Fraser Institute in the *Calgary Herald* (March 16, 2005). "This is why the spring grizzly hunt in Alberta expresses a hardiness – yea, a manliness – that can yet be celebrated." Is this all it comes down to: testosterone?

SRD managers continually refer to the "conservative" management of grizzly bears in Alberta. Ron Millson told a concerned citizen in a recent telephone conversation that SRD Minister David Coutts's decision was based on "staff recommendations" and that he (Millson) "won't make any decision that will harm bear populations." He admits that SRD

does not have really good population data but thinks they get a good idea of the grizzly bear population from the complaints they receive, especially from farmers.

Millson doesn't think hunting harms grizzly populations and blames their decline on habitat loss. And if grizzlies disappear from Alberta, well, there are thousands more in B.C. and the Territories. He stated that most jurisdictions use a 5 to 6 per cent annual hunting rate as standard, adding that even a population of only 250 bears can withstand a hunting harvest of 10 bears per year indefinitely.

As justification, he cited a 1993 report by P. D. McLoughlin, *Managing risk of decline for hunted populations of grizzly bears given uncertainty in population parameters*. According to McLoughlin 4.8 per cent "human-caused mortality" is acceptable, but hunting harvest is only a part of "human-caused mortality." In his view, a 5 per cent hunting harvest would be (nearly) acceptable in optimum habitat with no other sources of human mortality, which certainly isn't Alberta! The ESGBP study recorded four hunting deaths out of 18 human-caused mortalities. Alberta's Eastern Slopes do not represent "optimal" habitat; probably not even "moderate" habitat. Human-caused mortality includes many factors besides the hunt, including road deaths, poaching, and "nuisance" bears.

While following the trouble of Alberta's grizzly bears over the years has been an extremely frustrating experience, the one major note of optimism is that we know exactly why Alberta's grizzly bears are in trouble, and we know exactly what we need to do to recover them. Yet the grizzly remains in trouble.

"It's all about values," says writer Jeff Gailus. "Albertans, and Canadians, must decide whether they want to allow men to 'express their manliness' by killing bears, and continue to develop grizzly bear habitat to the point of pushing them further north and west and, eventually, out of the province altogether. Or do they want to live in a province of citizens that have the thoughtfulness and wisdom to restrain their egos and appetites to allow grizzly bears, and the clean water and other species that accompany them, to remain part of our heritage?"

Let the government know your concerns about our grizzly bears.

(The scientists' letter and news release can be found on our website. Jeff Gailus's blog can be found at www.actionworks.ca/albertagrizzlies/blog.html.)

GOVERNMENT MUST ACKNOWLEDGE HEALTH RISK OF CWD AND DANGER OF GAME FARMS

By Shirley Bray

For the third time in five years, the Alberta government is culling hundreds of deer near the Alberta-Saskatchewan border in an effort to limit the advance of Chronic Wasting Disease to wild deer in Alberta. The government refuses to acknowledge that CWD in wild deer in Canada has originated with deer on game farms, which foster and spread the disease. CWD is not an indigenous disease – it was imported.

Instead of shutting down the industry and dealing with CWD once and for all, the government is reopening the border to imports of captive deer and throwing millions of dollars in additional subsidies into an industry they know is dangerous and uneconomic. Over $100 million has been spent dealing with CWD on Canadian game farms. Thanks to government negligence, our tax dollars are being wasted and our wildlife continues to be put in jeopardy. Although no human form of CWD has been proven yet, experts agree that it's possible and that if it does occur, it could be of far greater risk than mad cow disease (BSE).

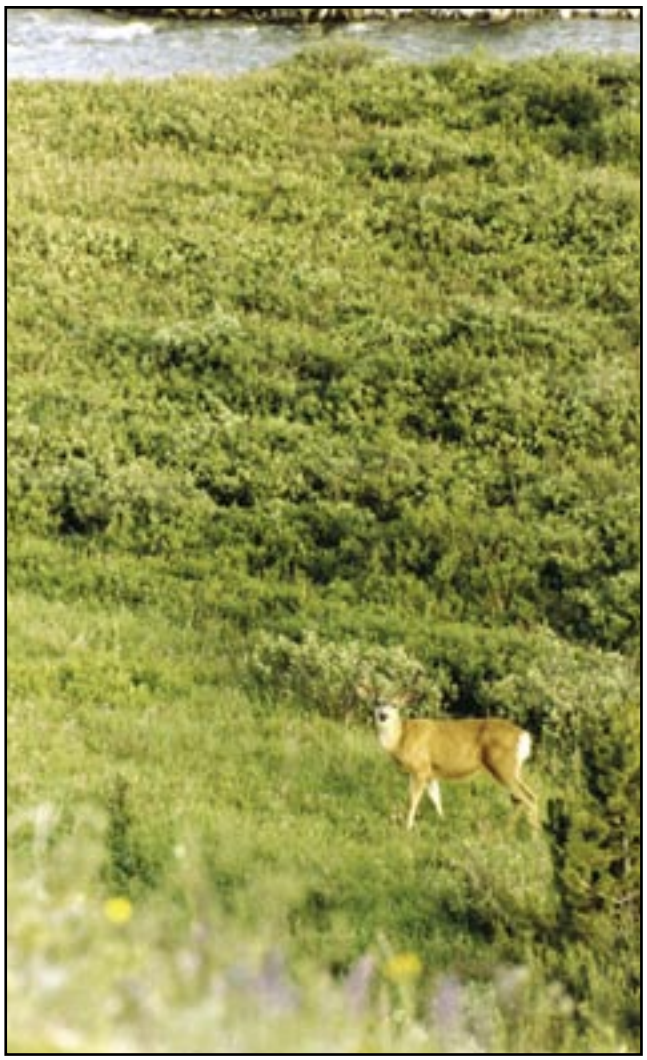
Minister of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD), Doug Horner said in the legislature in March that the government's intent is to encourage and build this "valued" industry in spite of the fact that former Agriculture Minister Shirley McClellan admitted that the game farming industry was uneconomic, game farmers admit it's dead, and world markets are at a low point. Even New Zealand deer farmers, who could out-compete Alberta game farmers any day, are in trouble. Horner thinks that it's irresponsible to be concerned about the health risks of CWD, that it's fear-mongering, and that it's an affront to the "entrepreneurial attitude" of game farmers. But no knowledgeable wildlife scientist would back him up.

The latest cull of deer was prompted by the discovery of four CWD-infected wild deer near the border in Saskatchewan. In that province, 40 game farms have been proven infected with CWD and some 8,000 animals have already been destroyed. In spite of efforts to eradicate it on game farms, CWD has spread to the wild, with at least 57 cases already confirmed. Culling deer on the Alberta side only has raised concerns that infected deer from Saskatchewan will simply migrate to the newly vacated area.

Although the culling strategy has a lot of support, Dr. Charles Southwick, professor emeritus of biology at the University of Colorado, points out that culls also kill healthy animals, some of whom may have genetic resistance to CWD (*High Country News*, June 10/02). He warns that "you're going to be culling deer in perpetuity" because no animal disease like CWD has ever been completely eradicated.

No wild deer in Alberta have been found to be infected yet, but Saskatchewan biologists found that even in an area where the disease is known to be present, they had

to examine a lot of brains before discovering one with CWD. Passive surveillance in Alberta includes testing elk and deer from roadkills and hunters, who are encouraged but not required to submit heads, from specific areas.



V. Pharis

A whitetail deer where it belongs – in the wild

Only three CWD-infected animals have been found on Alberta game farms so far. Alberta's CWD Surveillance Program for game-farmed animals became mandatory only in 2002 when the first case of CWD was discovered in northern Alberta. The compliance rate for the Mandatory Program for October 2003 to 2004 was 88 per cent for elk and only 57 per cent for deer. Although AAFRD is investigating cervid farms not in compliance, how many cases have gone undetected? How many captive animals, possibly carrying CWD, have escaped into the wild, been released by desperate game farmers, or interacted with wild deer?

Although highly infectious in wildlife populations, especially those in close quarters, CWD is difficult to study and is expensive partly because of the expense of caring for large mammals over the long periods that the disease can incubate and because there is no test for live animals. Although it was first discovered in a Colorado research facility in 1967 and first identified as a one of the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) in 1977 by the late Dr. Beth Williams, much remains to be learned.

It was only in 2003 that Williams and colleague Mike Miller published their results in *Nature* showing that CWD is transmitted horizontally from animal to animal. Her team is investigating the potential for spread through urine and feces. If this is found to be the case, unregulated urine and fecal scent products obtained from captive elk and deer and used by hunters could help spread the prions and bring them in contact with humans. Other research shows that CWD can remain in the environment for years after infected animals and even topsoil have been removed from the area (see *WLA* October 2003).

National Institute of Heath scientist and TSE expert Richard Race has found that some species can be carriers for TSEs and can transmit them to susceptible species. He is investigating the molecular species barrier, which may or may not stop CWD from infecting other species, including humans. Williams found no evidence that CWD can cross to cattle from elk and deer, except by direct injection of infected brain tissue into the brains of the cattle. Race would like to see brain tissue from the surviving cattle injected back into uninfected cattle and deer to see if they contract CWD.

Wildlife scientist Dr. Valerius Geist points out that only humans of a specific genetic makeup become infected with BSE and that it is possible that the experimental cattle might have been resistant (*Outdoor Canada,* 2003). Dr. Katherine O'Rourke, a microbiologist with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture is studying the genetic susceptibility of deer and elk to CWD and has found one gene combination that is particularly resistant (*High Country News,* June 10/02). Nebraska elk researcher Dr. Michael McDonnell believes that a copper deficiency makes animals more susceptible to CWD. He also thinks that organophosphate pesticides might cause mutation of healthy prions into malignant ones.

Prion disease experts at the Center for Disease Control in the U.S. are investigating the case of three Wisconsin hunters in their 50s and 60s who often ate venison and all died of neurological diseases, two of them from Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD). But the meat can't be tested, and researchers can only speculate as to the source of the diseases.

It's not likely that volunteers would line up to eat CWD-infected venison for the sake of science. So researchers are stuck using other methods. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin have found that CWD prions are able to convert normal human prions to the abnormal diseased form at about the same rate as BSE prions. Other experiments are using mice with human brain tissue.

Patrick Bosque, an assistant professor of neurology at the University of Colorado Denver Health Hospital, said it could take years to prove whether people are at risk (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* Dec. 2003), just as it took years for scientists to conclude that humans could contract a form of mad cow disease. Until then, he said, it is reasonable to assume that if enough people are exposed to the disease, over time at least a small number will get sick. He said that statements suggesting there is no scientific evidence that CWD can infect humans are deceptive.

A 2000 Health Canada report

states that "both animals and humans can be infected by various forms of TSE," and that "the possibility of TSE risk to humans must now be acknowledged." Elk antler food supplements, the main product from elk farms, were identified as a high-risk product. The World Health Organization recommends excluding from the human food chain all products from animals suspected of or infected with any prion disease. Unfortunately, CWD infected animals have entered the food chain. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency admitted in 2004 that as many as 110 CWD-infected elk carcasses might have entered the food chain. Just recently, a white-tailed deer was donated to the Verona Fire Department in New York and served at its Annual Sportsmen's Feast prior to the health department discovering it had CWD.

"A worst-case scenario can be imagined, and should inform the actions of governments," wrote John Stauber, executive director for the Center for Media and Democracy and co-author of *Mad Cow USA* (In These Times Magazine, Jan. 15/05). "For example, mad cow disease does not appear to spread from animal to animal. But the equivalent disease in North American deer and elk, CWD, does appear to be horizontally infectious. One deer can apparently infect another through saliva or feces. The nightmare: the emergence of a fatal human dementia spread through kissing."

If the government is serious about eliminating CWD, it must eliminate game farming as soon as possible and provide funding for proper decontamination procedures and long-term surveillance and monitoring. But so far, decisions on game farming have not been based on rational thought and certainly not on the precautionary principle.

Premier Klein has never followed through on his written promise that he is "fully committed to putting the privatization/commercialization of wildlife issue through a thorough and public assessment." In the legislature in March he said, "That has indeed been done. As a matter of fact, there was a great debate in caucus ... relative to not game farming so much as game shooting of wildlife that is domesticated on game farms." If that's how the premier keeps his promise, be ready to shell out millions more for this boondoggle.

ATHABASCA ARTIST COMBINES LOVE OF ART WITH PASSION FOR NATURE, SCIENTIFIC TRAINING

By John Geary

Deirdre Webb's (Griffiths) lifelong interest in natural history was forged in her early childhood with experiences that fostered rather than hindered that interest.

Deirdre Webb (Griffiths)

While Deirdre was growing up, her mother – a teacher – took her questions seriously and answered them the best she could, or provided an information source, rather than dismiss her daughter like many parents might do when asked, "Is that moon the same as the moon at home?" or "Why is the ocean sometimes blue and sometimes green?"

That fertilized her natural curiosity, which in turn developed into a passionate interest in birds at a very early age. "If you cultivate a real interest in something when you're young, it never leaves you," she says.

Wolverine in Beaver Country
© Deidre E. Webb

"I started keeping records of my observations at 11 and have done so virtually ever since. Re-reading the notes helps bring back the situation very clearly."

That interest in nature also expressed itself in the topics she drew as a youngster. "I've never been interested in drawing houses or people or machines," she says. "When I was in school I put illustrations of animals in any assignment I could squeeze them into."

Webb (Griffiths) began painting in her late teens and early 20s, following a long period of pencil drawing. In addition to her pencil and pen-and-ink drawings, she works with acrylic paints, gouache, and transparent watercolour.

While in high school, she harboured a desire to be a professional artist; however, concern about being able to earn a living, combined with her interest in natural history, led her to earn a BSc in ecology at Queen's University. "I thought by doing that, I'd be able to earn a living and continue doing art at the same time," she says. "People like Albert Hochbaum, an artist and director of the Delta Waterfowl Research Station, and [British

conservationist and] artist Peter Scott, [a founder of the World Wildlife Fund and designer of its panda logo] inspired me. I thought if they can do it, I can do it."

Of course, like many of the best-laid plans of mice and men, things did not quite turn out as she envisioned. "I was about 50 years too late. They were already in mid-career when I was starting out. They had started at a time when ecological and biological research was in its infancy, and it was possible to do both careers."

Marten in Winter
© Deidre E. Webb

Redpolls Eating Birch Seeds
© Deidre E. Webb

As she went further down the biology-ecology career path, she discovered that the intense specialization and research time required made it very difficult, if not downright impossible, to do both art and science. She worked at several jobs for a while, doing some illustrating and ecological surveying. Seeking more permanent employment, she wrote to the national park service and obtained a job as a park naturalist in Elk Island National Park, 40 km east of Edmonton.

Webb (Griffiths) worked there for three and a half years, but did not find much time to paint. While there, she met her future husband, entomologist Graham Griffiths, eventually left the park service, and became involved in his ecological consulting career.

She thought then she would finally be able to find time to paint, but again, everything else seemed to monopolize most of her time. She did manage to get some painting done during this mid-1970s period though, and her work gradually gained exposure in art tours and in the provincial museum.

Although Webb (Griffiths) worked as a park naturalist for less than four years, she always had a love for Elk Island and its western parkland. During the 1970s, she began working on a book about the park, Island Forest Year, which came out in 1979, a combination of text and pen-and-ink illustrations that takes readers through one season in Elk Island.

Her love for the park continued long after she stopped working as its naturalist. She illustrated Judith Cornish's book, *Finding Birds in Elk Island National Park,* published in 1988. That is her last piece of work related to the park, to date.

Webb (Griffiths) first became involved in Alberta areas north of Elk Island during the early 1980s. She was one of many conservationists opposed to the proposed Slave River hydroelectric dam project, which was eventually shelved. During her time there, she produced two paintings of pelicans, one of which sold at a WWF art auction. She also connected with the Canadian Wildlife Service, which commissioned her in 1985 to do a series of coloured pencil drawings for four broadsheets about northern river deltas.

She continued to live near Elk Island until 2001, when the north beckoned again. While working on a project at Crooked Lake, near Athabasca, in 1998, she fell in love with that part of the province, eventually settling down just outside the town. She is now working on establishing Otter Haven Studio there.

Another major focus is to produce paintings that represent animals behaving and carrying on their lives in their natural habitat. "I want to try to speak to the viewer so they see the painting as an animal living its natural life, without first thinking of it as a painting or looking for the artist signature," she says. "I want them to feel they are there, or at least, looking through a window and seeing something happening outside."

Right now, her subject focus is the boreal forest. She plans to do 25 or 30 paintings.

While she plans to spend more time just painting, she still keeps a hand in the conservation arena. "I'm always going to be interested in Crooked Lake, its environs and watershed. Hopefully we'll be able to secure long-term protection for it, one way or another."

Snipe and Chicks
© Deidre E. Webb

D. McIntyre

HEARD AROUND ALBERTA

Trumpeter swans, visible on the extreme left (downstream) end of an island of ice that formed in the Crowsnest River, are pictured as they were seen on January 4, 2005. The more distant boulders are part of the 1903 Frank Slide.

Trumpeter Swans Winter in Crowsnest Pass

Two trumpeter swans (an adult and one cygnet) spent the past winter within the footprint of the 1903 Frank Slide, in the Alberta community of Crowsnest Pass. The swans concentrated their activities on a lake-like portion of the Crowsnest River, directly below the summit of Turtle Mountain, within the margin of the historic rockslide. While coyotes encroached on the birds' diminishing access to open water during early January, the swans remained within their chosen Crowsnest River valley wintering area until spring, when local residents were treated to low-level flights as the two birds expanded their access to open water and enhanced feeding opportunities. *(Submitted by David McIntyre.)*

Walking Named Top Leisure Activity by Albertans

According to the 2004 Alberta Recreation Survey, the top five leisure-time activities are walking, gardening, crafts or hobbies, attending sports events, and attending fairs or festivals. Survey results can be found at www.cd.gov.ab.ca.

Wildlife Sanctuary Unsafe for Wildlife

On the Herald Creek Wildlife Sanctuary 23.5 kms west of the four-way stop in Water Valley on the Little Red River Road, someone has taken it upon themselves to dump dead cows in the bush to attract predators to the poison pellets that they have strewn around the area, says Barry Foster, a local resident who used to enjoy walking his dogs there.

Two years ago one of Foster's dogs died, disoriented and foaming at the mouth, within ten minutes after symptoms started. He and his wife suspected poison. They noticed a bloated cow carcass on the ground in the direction the dog had come from. After an absence of two years, they returned to the Sanctuary and saw four dead cows that had been dumped approximately two kms inside the area, just a little distance off the road. Right beside them was a dead wolf. A week later the wolf carcass mysteriously disappeared, but the foam on the muzzle of the wolf appeared the same as the foam that was coming out of the mouth of the dog that died there two years ago.

"It would appear that someone has taken it upon themselves to bait predators with the intention of poisoning them," says Foster. He found two more areas where dead cows had been dumped. "We feel this is an atrocity, as we Albertans that love and cherish our wilderness and enjoy the opportunity to walk through and see the wildlife in their natural habitat are being deprived of this experience by someone with no respect for other humans or any animal wild or tame that unsuspectingly travels through."

Jason Cadzow from Fish and Wildlife in Canmore is looking into the incident. But when Foster last took his two dogs out the Sanctuary, they both almost died. It turned out they unknowingly walked through an illegal dump of lethal leftovers from a meth lab near Cremona.

According to the government "wildlife sanctuaries are established only to control hunting, not other activities" (Hansard, June 25/92)

Attack of the AWA

In an interview with *Prairie Peak News* (Dec.-Jan. 2005), outgoing Environment Minister Lorne Taylor said he sees some groups as effective advocates for the environment "but an organization like the Alberta Wilderness Association isn't. ... When you attack, attack, attack, you back people into a corner, and leave them with no choice but to come out fighting." Build relationships, he says, try to understand where others are coming from. Hmmm. This is the same Taylor who once treated one of his constituents to a 15-minute tirade about AWA. His constituent, not wanting to listen to a tedious repeat, decided not to tell Taylor at that moment that he had just become a Director for AWA. Taylor still thinks building the Meridian Dam is a good idea, even though it has been shown to be a bad idea economically and environmentally.

The Lesson of Thoreau

"The lesson of Thoreau," writes Tom Hayden in "The Conscience by the Pond" (*Orion*, Jan./Feb. 2005), "is not that environmentalists and nonviolent spiritual seekers should retreat from the worlds of poverty, racism, and war, or focus on voluntary simplicity alone as the antidote to consumption. Their natural dignity, he seems to argue, requires that they understand themselves as carriers of a 'wildness' that resists all bondage....Thoreau's call is to live heroically as nature does, to feel both the inner and outer as one, to link personal self-reliance with direct action in the world, and to resist the nature of any state that does not conform to the state of nature."

Uniting the Right

In "Tentacles of Rage," Lewis H. Lapham traces the history of the "Republican propaganda mill" from the 1960s to the present (*Harper's Magazine*, Sept. 2004). "I never learned how to make sense of the weird and

too numerous inward contradictions," he says of the hodgepodge of beliefs and ideas that have been espoused by various camps under the Republican banner. "In the glut of paper I could find no unifying or fundamental principle except a certain belief that money was good for rich people and bad for poor people," he concludes. "It was the only point on which all the authorities agreed, and no matter where the words were coming from ... the authors invariably found the same abiding lesson in the tale – money ennobles rich people, making them strong as well as wise; money corrupts poor people, making them stupid as well as weak."

ASSESSING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS WITH BEARS: CHARLIE RUSSELL'S POINT OF VIEW

Charlie Russell in Kamchatka

Dear Editor:

I am puzzled and disappointed that naturalist groups would support and promote the notion that habituating large predators to the presence of humans is a good idea. Perhaps I have a poor understanding of what Charlie Russell's program (research?) is about. Is it about semi-domesticating grizzly bears? If so, how could anyone view that as a positive? How will it benefit grizzly bears?

There is nothing novel about taming bears. Historically, the Russians did it for their circus and Hollywood does it for their movies.

Besides the obvious ethical problem, there is one of safety both to bears and humans. Habituated bears are easy targets for vehicles, hunters, and poachers. Can you really trust a semi-domesticated grizzly bear? Who wants them? Wouldn't they become a nuisance? National parks spend large sums of money trying to undo the effects of habituation.

Let bears be wild. The best way for humans and large predators to coexist is through mutual respect and yes, some fear. I don't want a grizzly to lick my hand like a dog. I want to see him running wild and free in his natural habitat the way he is meant to. I believe that habituating bears to humans provides only costs with no benefits. Precious resources are wasted that would be better used to protect large tracts of suitable habitat where grizzlies can continue to function as a great symbol of wilderness. Tarnishing this great symbol will most certainly detract from wilderness. Natural systems need less contact with humans, not more. Wildlife and people should remain totally separated whenever possible; interference is only warranted when it is absolutely necessary.

Again, I am surprised that a program like Charlie Russell's, which seems so contrary to the best interests of natural systems, is not being recognized as a conflict of interest by groups whose mission it is to promote wilderness. Is taming grizzly bears so much different from game farming?

– Reg Ernst

Charlie Russell responds:

Dear Editor:

In response to the letter sent to you by Reg Ernst, he might find it shocking or even horrific when I tell him that I talk to many people around the world about this issue and that there are an amazing number who see some merit in what I am doing, including the executive of the AWA, even though there are probably some among their ranks who have also long used the grizzly bear as a tool to win hard-fought battles to secure wilderness by insisting that these bears can only survive in that setting. At one time I did the same, but I eventually realized it that it was counter-productive by not being very beneficial to the grizzly bear.

People like Mr. Ernst have always used the word "respect" interchangeably with fear. I think what he describes on his park jaunts are fearful bears, not necessarily wild or respectful bears. Why would they not be? As he says, much of the Park's energy goes into making them fearful and keeping them that way in order to keep people and bears separate. I understand their worries, but it is the people they can not control, mostly because they have never tried to do that. They would rather curtail the bears' activities. Years ago I took it on to try to understand if all this harshness was really necessary because it displaces bears from many areas they need.

There are several problems with his assumptions stated in his letter. Most of them are to do with his being content with popular belief and the status quo. I got exploring popular belief because I saw problems for the bear with what was always stated as fact about them. In particular,

there was the insistence that they are 1. unpredictable and 2. inherently dangerous once they lose their fear of humans. I thought it important to understand, very clearly, these things because over the past few hundred years, these two beliefs have been responsible for thousands of bears being killed just because they wanted to inhabit the same land that we do.

When bear viewing began to gain popularity as a way to make money from live bears instead of dead ones, I was one of the first guides in Canada of this ilk. I had a big problem because the same officials who set the rules for hunting them also decided what criteria should be used for just watching them. I found soon enough that assumptions by these people did not fit what happened when bears were not punished for being around people.

It was soon evident that they quickly begin to like people once they understood that humans were there every day to take an interest in what they were doing and were not going to hurt them. The delight which people had for what they experienced was quickly picked up on and appreciated by these very intelligent animals. It is a totally different world when one is close enough hear the faintest noises they make, able to see them eat a singe insect, and get to understand their emotions as they change.

To illustrate a similar situation with another species, one of my seasoned clients told me a story about what he had experienced in Scammons Lagoon in Baja, where the Mexicans had not followed the Americans' lead by making it a crime to be close to the grey whales while whale watching. In the lagoon, the guides would take them out in Zodiacs, shut off their outboard motors, and let the whales come to them, which they always did.

There was mutual delight when people stroked them around their big eyes, only inches away from their own eyes. He told me of a female whale birthing a calf a few meters away from them. As soon as it was free of her body, she nudged the calf to the surface for its first breath and a few moments later she pushed the calf over to the Zodiac to let the amazed people touch it. It was clearly something the mother wanted her calf to experience and the sooner the better. These are animals that were thought to be extinct from over-hunting until the 1940s, when a few were discovered in that very lagoon.

Even though it had happened two years previously, this man could not tell me about this without tears running down his cheeks. He told me because the experiences he had with the grizzlies of the Khutzeymateen were similar. I had just used my canoe paddle to hold against a bear's chest as a restraint to tell it that it was as close as I wanted it to be to my guests. They were only a meter or so behind me when I did this, following my instructions by talking calmly to the bear. Everyone was having an incredible time.

Later, in Russia, I have had females who, as soon as they understood that I was trustworthy, left their cubs with me to babysit while they enjoyed some freedom from their otherwise unending responsibilities to keep them safe.

I understand that Mr. Ernst has been taught all his life that humans are not and should not consider themselves a part of nature and that it is not possible to be really accepted into wild animals' lives. What he has missed somewhere in his education is that all this wild and tame stuff is just a state of mind. Humans don't have to be a contaminant of the wilderness. If the bears I have hobnobbed with have taught me anything it is that, of course we are a part of nature – what else are we if not that? We can only choose – are we going to be a positive part or a negative part.

The hunter/bear viewer officials hated what I did because in the hunting side of their job, it was customary to charge about $10,000 dollars for a grizzly killing licence. If word got out that the grizzly was really a peace-loving animal and had the propensity to like people and be safe around them, having put down their guns, they might not be able to sell enough licenses to pay their salaries.

Eventually I realized that I had to stop using my bear viewing clients as guinea pigs and I decided to do a personal study. I set out with my partner, Maureen Enns, to learn about what made bears tick. My study has not been about domesticating bears or habituating them, whatever that means. It is about the possibility of learning to share the land with them, and I guess that because I am not a scientist, you might argue that I have never been a researcher. So be it, but no one in the world has spent more time living with brown bears. For 45 years I have pondered this idea of humans and grizzly bears co-existing much better than we do.

Before I wrote *Spirit Bear: Encounters with the White Bear of the Western Rainforest* or guided bear viewers and before I went to Russia, I had ranched for 18 years up against Waterton Park, where there are plenty of grizzlies. I encouraged the grizzlies to feel comfortable on my land and looked carefully at whether the threat they posed for my cattle and for myself was real.

This experience was the first of many that made me realize that there was a huge amount of mythology about this animal, that they were basically peaceful if we would ever allow them to be peaceful, and that they at least were willing to share land with us if we would let them. This was an important realization because they need productive land as much as we do, not the rock and ice Reg and others would like to relegate them to.

I got thinking that if people could relax about allowing them to be in the front country and the corridors of our National Parks and on our ranch land, we could recreate a huge amount of habitat for them just by understanding a much truer side of their nature. Of course, this would mean that people would have to give up using them the way they have been doing, insisting that they are synonymous with pure wilderness. Of course they are a "great symbol of wilderness," but they are more than that.

Eleven years ago I got real serious about looking at what was possible in this regard. If there was still a place left, I wanted to go there and live with them on their terms. I found what might have been the last chance to do this in Russia. Everywhere else in the world was guarded by people who believed that bears should only exist in fear of humans.

This place I found still had a large number of brown bears. I built a cabin among them and saw to it that

their experiences with me would build on their trust rather than giving them the usual experiences of violence and persecution that man has inflicted on them ever since the gun was invented. Before that time it was quite simple: we had to get along with them or get out of the country they wanted to live in. I had no gun.

My Eden for the bears lasted for seven years before the status quo caught up with this place again. It is too long a story to relate here, but I confirmed, without a doubt, that brown bears are not unpredictable – humans are. Also, that they give back what they receive. As long as they are treated kindly you can trust them explicitly. It appears that there are a very few individual males who turn predator toward humans when they are old, but these few bears probably built up a long hatred for people from their experiences with them. I have not been around these kind of animals for their full lifetime to see if they too could be trusted if they had a benign history with us.

I am not suggesting that others should do what I have done ever again. I just had to set the record straight about who was the problem in the bear/human relationship.

So Reg, you can keep going into the wilderness feeling like an intruder if you want. Perhaps that is a real comforting feeling for you. You can look down your nose at me, but I don't mind telling you that I am proud that I have taken what might have been the last opportunity to have a careful look at whose fault it is that we can't share the land with the grizzly bear. This might never have been an issue with you, but it has been for me because I like sharing. As I said, what I have found out might never be important if the status quo is what you want to maintain, until we don't have any bears. But if the next generation wants to do things differently, they might find something useful in what I have learned.

– Charlie Russell

RESPONSE TO "BEWARE KANANASKIS NORTH" LETTER

Dear Editor:

You have asked me if I would like to respond to "Beware Kananaskis North," the letter to the editor from Dr. Richard Thomas that appeared in the last edition of *Wild Lands Advocate*. What to say? First, no one should dispute Richard's point that on an international ecological significance scale, the protection of the Garner Fen really amounts to peanuts. It does not accomplish more than this and I am glad I never claimed anything to the contrary.

What may be debated though are his inferences about tactics – what paths do we take if we want to improve the ecological integrity of Lakeland? Although Richard says we should approach Ray Danyluk with "a hefty dose of caution" (no argument there), the tone of Richard's warning says much more than this.

"Beware Kananaskis North" infers that there is little or no value in talk and discussion with provincial politicians with respect to Lakeland. This, at least, is the conclusion I draw from his charge that all provincial Tory MLAs are ecological illiterates and his thinly veiled allusion to environmental criminals. This language promises to close doors, not open them. How likely would you be to pick up the telephone to discuss anything with an ecological illiterate or criminal? This type of language effectively makes one possible path – the path of negotiation, debate, and compromise – inaccessible.

One of the starkest, simplest aspects of political reality in Alberta is that Conservative backbenchers wield power. For this reason, I think it would be foolish not to talk to them. It would be foolish not to explore the possibilities that an MLA's statements about a tiny fen and a "Kananaskis of the North" might signal an opening that we might be able to take advantage of.

For the time being I suppose I will have to bear the burden of being "hopeful" and of perhaps suffering from "relentless positivism." I only wish this last term had not been coined by the relentlessly pompous John Ralston Saul!

– Ian Urquhart

P.S. - Some readers will no doubt want to pursue the cormorant issue raised by Dr. Thomas and write the Premier and the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development about repealing the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act (2002) – this Act was referred to as Bill 206. Although it is a fact that this legislation was passed by the legislature and received Royal Assent, readers would be mistaken if their letters claim that this law is in effect. It is not because it has not been proclaimed.

Lynx
© Deidre E. Webb

IS ALBERTA A SUSTAINABLE PLACE FOR CARIBOU?

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the Regional Environmental Action Committee, I would like to thank AWA for the initiative and coordination toward protecting threatened caribou herds in northern Alberta. Our committee has made attempts to participate on the Lesser Slave Lake Forest Public Advisory Committee (PAC) previously without much success in getting our ideas across. The thought that Alberta "might not be a sustainable place" for caribou was expressed at one PAC meeting that I walked out of.

Despite some frustration, our group has recently committed to keep participating in these PAC meetings. I have also been meeting with forest planners, and last week, five years after bringing it to the PAC, we managed to identify the precise area where my crew and I had noticed some "bald spots" in a reforested area while filming a video production.

We hope to host a showing of "Being Caribou" in empathy with our Alberta herds. It is not caribou's behaviour which is unsustainable in Alberta, it is unnaturally our own processes which have created this perilous situation for them.

I believe that the "cumulative efforts" of all of our work toward preservation will provide more hope for sustainability of ecosystems. Everyone agrees with sustainability on paper – it's an argument about methods, how effective they are, and how this applies in the forest.

Thank you again for your important work,

– Jule Asterisk,
Secretary, Regional Environmental Action Committee

D. McIntyre

A SUPERHIGHWAY'S SUPER ECONOMY

Looking west across the Crowsnest River valley and Highway 3 in the community of Crowsnest Pass. Turtle Mountain, producer of the 1903 Frank Slide, dominates the skyline, while Crowsnest Mountain is visible in the distance.

Dear Editor:

The government's on-the-drawing-board plan to create a high-speed superhighway through the spectacularly beautiful, wildlife-rich, and historically significant community of Crowsnest Pass has received criticism from people representing all walks of life. It's time someone stepped forward to counter this assault by presenting the proposed highway's economic benefit.

For *only* a few hundred million dollars the government can, in the name of saving five minutes for the masses, destroy the lives of a mere six thousand expendable people, erase a struggling economy, reduce the valley's inflated property values, devaluate the needless historical fabric of internationally acclaimed historical resources, and – *here comes the exciting part* – expand, many-fold, the bloody footprint of what is *already* North America's deadliest stretch of highway (as viewed in terms of total annual carnage among cougars, black bears, grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, elk, moose, and two species of deer).

Each year motorists use their vehicles to convert this expendable community's expendable wildlife into 30,000 pounds of road-ground meat at a cost of only $500,000 in vehicular damage and an occasional human death. It would appear that society can inflate these numbers if we take advantage of this exciting, high-speed plan. And if the fill-the-valley-with-concrete plan doesn't work – that is, if we obliterate our most threatened wildlife species in the process – well ... no one can criticize the government by saying they chose the cheapest, most efficient solution.

The few proponents of the high-speed plan, silent in their ability to express any virtue in their vision, would appear to have two hidden goals: the sacrifice of one of Alberta's largest and most spectacular communities in the hope of bringing added wealth and prosperity to the rest of the province; and the powerful presentation of an at-the-BC-border image of what can be done when you have money to burn, people who are expendable, and priceless heritage resources you're willing to destroy.

If society is being treated honestly with respect to the vision that the proposed high-speed superhighway won't be built for twenty years, it's obvious that an increasingly concerned and vocal populace won't allow it to happen. The real concern is that the highway that's on the drawing board for 2025 will – *surprise, surprise* – be built tomorrow, before society has a chance to unite in meaningful opposition.

– David McIntyre
Crowsnest Pass, AB

J.P. Foley

STAYING RELEVANT

By Cliff Wallis, AWA Past-President

The ability of Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) to adapt to changing societal values and changing economies is crucial to its success with wildland issues. There is no higher calling for AWA than to ensure that our members and the public at large are informed on wildland issues in a way that motivates people and leads to positive outcomes for wildlands and wildlife.

We will fail if we have only changed the name of our newsletter, sported a new logo, and communicated only to ourselves with jargon and an attitude that doesn't resonate with the broader community. What do species in decline, ecosystem function, and productive capacity mean to most people? Or more importantly, will hearing about these subjects motivate people to protect those things most important to us? While science must be the key building block, appealing to our spiritual and emotional sides is likely to have greater effect. We need to provoke outrage at the loss of wildlife and water quality that occurs with each new assault on the wilderness; to engender compassion and love for those wild havens that sustain and enrich our lives; and to work with communities to chart economic futures that comfort their citizens AND protect wildlands. It is not good enough just to deal with people's spiritual future – they also need to be reassured about their economic sustenance. While we must focus on the spiritual side, we ignore the economy at our peril.

People we would like to engage in a conversation may refuse to do so if we can't relate to them and to their hopes and aspirations as well as their fears. It is somewhat of a paradox in which we find ourselves. Our job is to defend the status quo our old way – that is, wilderness and wildlife in functional ecosystems; however, we can't accept the status quo in the ways we do our business and reach out to the community. We must naturally oppose growth in use/abuse of our wildlands but at the same time encourage growth in our membership and approaches to better influence decisions on the things we care about.

We must constantly ask ourselves if we are still relevant and continue to refresh and renew our tactics. We need to attract even more young people. We need to work at ensuring that our values are being taught and incorporated into the lives of people of all cultures and across every community in Alberta. Above all, AWA must stay relevant. As Thad Box says, "If organizations are insensitive to social changes they will become irrelevant. One cannot market relevancy, one lives it" – and I would add, thinks and breathes it. Box goes on to say that "we must change ourselves first ... through a constant process of the death of old dogma-based concepts and resurrection of new visions of the interconnections of people and the land." AWA does not need to become relevant – it already is. The trick is staying relevant – endless transformation and adaptation will be the keys.

It's a competitive world out there for ideas and finances. We must never get tired or boring. Our society is changing rapidly and we must keep pace with that change. We need to think outside of our box and find new ways to connect with the population at large. Doing things the old way is a recipe for senescence and death. In the end, what good will we be if our words and actions lack passion and resolve?

What does this mean for AWA? It means continuing on a path we have set for ourselves. We don't want to be an army of uniformed soldiers, and I am glad to say we haven't become one. We would be pretty ineffective if all we had were biologists or politicians on staff. We can never become a monolith. We want a diversity of thought and new creative approaches. We need to keep looking at the horizon while keeping our feet firmly planted on the ground. We can't deny our roots and our calling, but we must also open our minds and our hearts to new ideas and new techniques. Social scientists, communicator/lobbyists, economists, conservation biologists, writers, dreamers, and, yes, fundraising professionals – they are all essential to our success.

There is a crisis not so much in wildland protection but in how we manage the relationship between wildlands and society. People will always be the key to our success or our failure in these endeavours. It is crucial

D. Olson

A coyote hunts on the prairie

that we connect with people on an intellectual as well as a raw emotional level. Good ideas are nothing without the passion to drive them home. We need inspired lobbyists, writers, and speakers to touch the hearts and influence the minds of the public and decision-makers. We must be out in the communities of Alberta and in the corridors of power, in industry and in government. We must forge alliances with our friends and with some of our so-called enemies. We have to be relentless in our advocacy for wildlands and wildlife.

Thad Box cited the kind of language that motivates me and perhaps a legion of others who want to protect this planet: a piece by Terry Tempest Williams entitled "Redemption." She was contemplating the wide-open grasslands and thought of birds on their spring migration, dancing grouse on their ancestral grounds and pronghorn antagonized and running back and forth

along a barbed wire fence. She writes about a dead coyote hung on a barbed wire fence: "My eyes turned to Jesus Coyote, stiff on his cross, savior of our American rangelands. We can try and kill all that is native, string it up by its hind legs for all to see, but spirit howls and wilderness endures. Anticipate resurrection."

AWA is in no need of resurrection, but it must ensure that its spirit howls so wilderness endures.

(*With apologies and thanks to Thad Box* "On Becoming Relevant" *from* Rangelands *October 2004*)

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Rotraut Pfaefflin, a long-time member of AWA, was known as a woman ahead of her time, achieving academic recognition in pharmacy and in 1947 a doctorate in medicine. She enjoyed the outdoors and was an avid skier, kayaker, and cyclist in her younger years. She passed away on January 18, 2005 at the age of 91. AWA sincerely appreciates the gifts of family and friends who so thoughtfully made contributions in memory of Rotraut. AWA's provincial office hosts a memorial plaque with the names of those who have been remembered through the years with memorial contributions.

OPEN HOUSE PROGRAM

SUMMER DAY HIKES

An exciting program of 10 day hikes to a variety of Alberta's wild places. All hikes are led by local experts with a wealth of environmental and historical knowledge of their area.

All day hikes: $20.00
Pre-registration required for all hikes
Contact us: (403) 283-2025, toll-free 1-866-313-0713, awa@shaw.ca

Saturday, June 4, 2005
Twin Rivers Heritage Rangeland
with Cheryl Bradley

Sunday, June 12, 2005
The Whaleback
with Bob Blaxley

Saturday, June 18, 2005
Rumsey Natural Area
with Dorothy Dickson

Sunday, June 26, 2005
Porcupine Hills
with Vivian Pharis

Saturday, July 23, 2005
Lakeland
with Dr. Richard Thomas

Saturday, July 23, 2005
Ya Ha Tinda
with Will Davies

Saturday, August 20, 2005
Beehive Natural Area
with James Tweedie

Saturday, September 10, 2005
The Whaleback
with Bob Blaxley

Saturday, September 24, 2005
Picklejar Lakes
with Vivian Pharis

Saturday, May 28, 2005
Majorville Bus Tour
with Jay Bartsch

Join us for an interpretive bus trip to the wetlands of Majorville, visiting:

- The Medicine Wheel Project, a wetlands conservation program managed by Ducks Unlimited.
- A visit to the Majorville Medicine Wheel, possibly North America's oldest.

The bus trip will depart Calgary at 7:30 a.m. and return around 5:30 p.m. A picnic lunch will be provided, and there will be stops for refreshments on the way.

$30 – AWA members
$40 – Non-members
Pre-registration is required for the bus tour.

OTHER EVENTS

Thursday, April 28th, 2005
Scary and Slimy, but Intriguing and Important: Why You Should Care about Alberta's Amphibians & Reptiles!
With Dr. Tony Russell
TIME: 7:00 p.m.
LOCATION: Bow Valley Ranch Visitor Centre East end of Fish Creek Provincial Park, access via Bow Bottom Trail
ADMISSION: Free (donations appreciated)
CONTACT: Kristin Dyer, Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society, (403) 238-3841, Kristin@friendsoffishcreek.org, www.friendsoffishcreek.org

June 3-5, 2005
Crowsnest Conservation Third Annual Birding Festival
Contact: Merilyn Liddell, meri_ruth@hotmail.com, (403) 564-5155

CORRECTIONS

WLA February 2005, page 20, the photo labeled St. Mary River is the Oldman River.

WLA February 2005, page 21, the photos labeled Yellow Creek is Yarrow Creek.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS BACKPACKING TRIPS

Explore some of the most magnificent wilderness areas Alberta has to offer

June 20-22, 2005
Bighorn Wildland
With Don Wales as your guide, explore the headwaters of the Littlehorn and Bighorn Creeks in the heart of the Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area.

July 27-29, 2005
South Castle Wildland
Recreation Area
Join guide Reg Ernst on an exploration of the Yarrow Creek headwaters of South Castle.

August 11-14, 2005
White Goat Wilderness
Traverse Nigel and Cataract Pass with guide Don Wales to explore the headwaters of Cataract Creek on the edge of the White Goat Wilderness area.

Experience Alberta's wilderness through minimal impact backpacking and overnight camping. Our guides will share with you their intimate knowledge of the natural history of these beautiful areas. Trips are self-catered, but your guide will make sure you are prepared with the proper equipment, food, fitness level, and trip route and will also be there for first aid and emergencies.

Contact AWA at (403) 283-2025 or awa@shaw.ca to book your space or for more details.

Cost: $100 – AWA members
$125 – Non-members

Pre-registration required for all backpacking trips. To preserve a wilderness experience, each of these trips will be limited to eight participants.

AWA's backpacking program is supported by a grant from Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

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