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AWA



A WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



Boreal Forest PHOTO: © W. LYNCH

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COVER PHOTO

The boreal forest is Canada's largest ecosystem, covering nearly sixty percent of the country. The Canadian Boreal Initiative describes the boreal as "an ecosystem of astonishing power." The CBI is committed to working with a wide range of actors to establish a network of protected areas and conservation zones over at least half of the boreal.

FEATURED ARTIST

Loretta Kyle was born in Hemingford Québec, studied biological sciences at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and now lives in Bonnyville Alberta. She has been sculpting for more than twenty years with a particular focus on birds. Her attraction to both stone and birds is explained in this excerpt from the artist biography she wrote for the Effusion Gallery in Invermere: "I am happiest when I have stone in my hands. I am driven to seek it out, touch it, explore it, carve it. I believe that stone is as essential to our lives as water and air. Stone teaches patience, to think before acting or speaking. Its hardness slows me down, grounds me. Birds represent every human emotion from absolute revulsion to utter awe. I enjoy freeing them from blocks of stone."

Loretta's sculptures are available from several galleries including the Effusion Gallery (www.affusionartgallery.com/home.php), the Art Sales and Rental Collection at the Art Gallery of Alberta (www.artgalleryalberta.com), and the Gallery shop at the Art Gallery of Calgary.

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ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

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Alberta Wilderness Association is a charitable non-government organization dedicated to the completion of a protected areas network and the conservation of wilderness throughout the province. To support our work with a tax-deductible donation, call (403) 283-2025 or contribute online at AlbertaWilderness.ca.

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PHOTO: I. URQUHART

IS THE SUN RISING OR SETTING ON PROTECTED AREAS?

Wayne Lynch's stunning cover photograph for this issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate* provides an apt metaphor for August's protected areas theme. Is the sun rising or setting on the future of protected areas? The first three articles this month examine this issue from different directions and contexts. They share one important point – any number of criteria may be used, singly or in combination, to guide the choices we make about how we treat the land. The ultimate issue when it comes to answering questions regarding “how much” of any landscape should be protected from human activity is deciding what values we want to respect and, then, what concrete expressions of government or private action further those values.

“Next-year country” is a phrase likely familiar to long-time residents of Alberta. It describes the optimistic state-of-mind found among the prairies' farmers and ranchers. There is always next year if, for example, Mother Nature delivers too little (or too much) rain. To consider protected areas in Alberta demands this outlook. While too much of Alberta's recent conservation history (ie. Special Places) has been tremendously disappointing this issue of *WLA* points out there may be reasons to be hopeful.

Alberta's grasslands, like most of Earth's temperate grasslands, enjoy little protection. Consequently, many of this province's endangered species are found, for as many days as they have left, there. Nigel Douglas' story on sage-grouse highlights what may be a monumental victory for grasslands, the endangered sage-grouse, and endangered species more generally. The Federal Court of Canada's ruling that Environment Canada did not identify critical habitat for sage-grouse in its recovery plan may open the door to the greater habitat protection required for the grouse to have any future. It may also benefit other species-at-risk in this or some other ecosystem.

Carolyn Campbell's article on the boreal also notes several hopeful signs. The Canadian Boreal Initiative is pushing the protected areas agenda in Canada's taiga by recommending that at least half of our northern forests become part of a protected areas/conservation zone network. Furthermore, the Regional Advisory Council established as part of Alberta's new boreal land-use planning process has been charged to “consider conservation scenarios that secure 20 per cent or greater of the boreal forest while achieving economic objectives.”

As Carolyn notes AWA joined with other conservation organizations to supply the Regional Advisory Council with data identifying conservation priority areas in much of the Lower Athabasca region. This sort of work, exemplified as well in AWA's five-year monitoring program in the Bighorn (also detailed in this issue), is another positive aspect of our pursuit of furthering the protected areas agenda. Conservation organizations, often supported by progressive foundations, are concerned with giving governments the reasoned, well-supported arguments our politicians seem to crave before committing to greater protection of our lands.

Nigel and Carolyn also offer two notes of optimism in the Updates portion of the Wilderness Watch section. First, government rejected suggestions that introducing a hunt for sandhill cranes was appropriate at this time. Second, Alberta Parks is in the midst of consulting Albertans as *WLA* goes to press about adding all eight islands in the east basin of Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park. This proposed addition was the brain-child of Tom Maccagno – longtime AWA member and champion of a natural boreal.

The work of Maccagno joins that of the Whaleback defenders James Tweedie and Judy Huntley (applauded in the Association News section), Steve Dixon (recognized in the Recall of the Wild), as well as that of the late Dr. Bill Fuller (too briefly eulogized in the In Memoriam section) in making what may be the most important point of all. Individuals matter. Maybe, just maybe, through the vision and perseverance of people like these the sun may be rising on the future of protected areas in Alberta.

- Ian Urquhart, Editor



WHY? HOW? THINKING ABOUT PROTECTED AREAS

By Ian Urquhart

“Protected areas” – Do we need them? If so, where should they be established? What activities should they be protected from? Questions such as these have been at the centre of many debates about wilderness and protecting landscapes in our lifetimes. In the next two issues of the Advocate AWA takes a tentative stab at outlining the “why” and the “how” of the protected areas debate.

Why?

Why should we protect portions of landscapes or ecosystems from all, or some, human activities? For many, the answer is as plain as the nose on our faces. But start to list those answers and you will soon realize there are many, many possible responses to the “why” question. Four people in a room may agree on the importance of protecting areas but they may come to that conclusion for very different reasons. For you, biodiversity may be the crucial concern pushing you to demand that government establish protected areas; for me, it may be aesthetics – I may not want commercial logging, for example, to scar the views I enjoy from my family’s retreat on the shores of the West Arm of Kootenay Lake outside of Nelson, B.C. A mutual friend may stress an economic perspective – the tourism dollars certain types of protected areas may generate. A fourth soul may offer another, more recent, economic argument – the dollar value of the ecological services intact landscapes such as watersheds provide us. And this far from exhausts the rationales we could offer for protecting landscapes from human impacts if we invited more champions of protected areas to join us. What about the cultural and the historical/heritage arguments, for example, some want us to consider when it comes to the issue of “why?”

Many of the above arguments in favour of protecting landscapes or setting aside wilderness are largely, if not entirely, about “us.” They are



With Authority. 31cmH x 17L x 20W Brazilian soapstone. PHOTO: © LORETTA KYLE

anthropocentric – human-centred – perspectives. Set aside wilderness areas or protect landscapes in order to further the needs and wants of people. Leslie Bella’s 1987 book *Parks for Profit* emphatically makes the point that Banff, Yoho, Jasper, and Glacier National Parks were created to cater to railway tourism interests, not to preserve wilderness. A similar human-centred story may be told about the history of creating National Parks in the United States. Roderick Nash notes that Yellowstone (1872), the Adirondacks (1885), and Yosemite (1890) were preserved “for people’s pleasure and

for utilitarian purposes such as water and game supply.”

The biodiversity rationale identified above for protection and/or for wilderness may propel the discussion of the “why” question in a “non-human” direction. There the concern becomes the health of others, not other people, but other species – irrespective of what their health may contribute to human wellbeing. In the last generation “deep ecologists” have most notably provided this “non-human” direction. From their laptops they have chastised those who value wilderness or protected areas

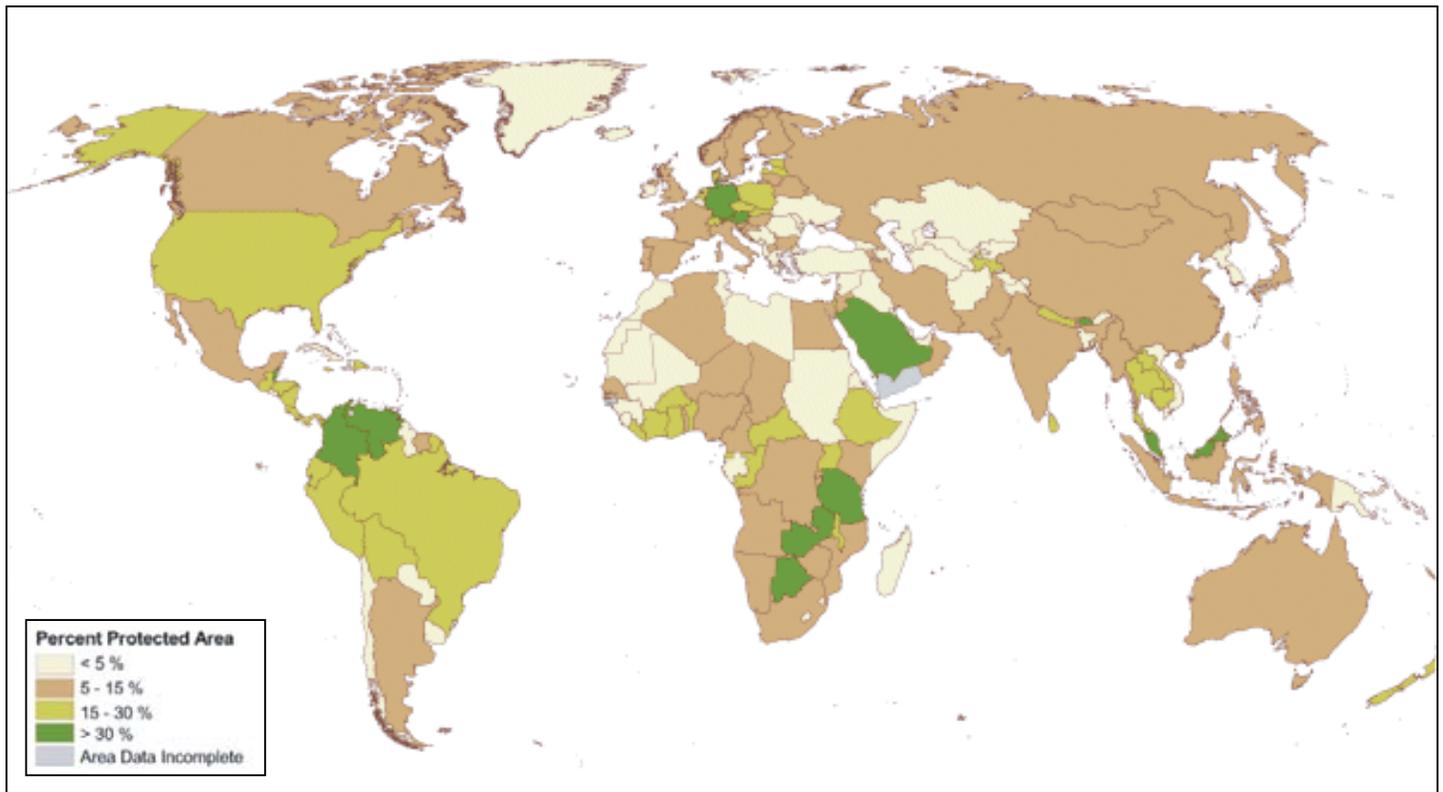


FIGURE 1: PERCENT OF TOTAL LAND AREA PROTECTED (ALL DESIGNATIONS). SOURCE: WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE, 2003.

only for what such areas do for people. Norwegian Arne Naess, perhaps the most famous deep ecologist, contended: “A wilderness area has a value independent of whether humans have access to it.” David Brower, of Sierra Club fame, placed his view in the context of rights and his belief that rights needed to be extended to non-humans. “I believe,” he said, “in the rights of creatures other than man.” Preserving wilderness was one way he believed we could recognize and respect the rights of other species.

Pretty radical stuff eh? Give orangutans or chimpanzees rights? What about grizzlies? What’s next – old growth forests? Mountain vistas? Remarkable patterned fens? But, before you slam the door on this “radical talk” think for a minute about the history of rights and how that history has changed to reflect changes in societal norms. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold’s now-classic work he opens his famous chapter on “The Land Ethic” with a tragic Greek tale. Odysseus returns from the wars in Troy and hangs twelve slave-girls because he suspected them of behaving badly. The story is tragic only when judged according to the ethics of today, not the ethics of ancient Greece. At a time when slaves were considered “property,” not humans, the behaviour of Odysseus

was fine – it was ethical. It is only when slaves joined humanity (not that many years ago in the United States) that this situation was condemned by society.

Considering how rights and ethics have been extended through history someone who today argues that we have an ethical obligation to protect landscapes and our non-human brothers and sisters may be no more “radical” than the abolitionists of the 18th and 19th Centuries. Wilderness and the species who need wild places in order to survive are analogous to the slaves the abolitionists sought to free. Those who today make non human-centred arguments for preserving wilderness in the future may join famous abolitionists such as William Wilberforce and William Garrison as being regarded as visionaries or reformers, not as crackpots. They echo Leopold’s now 60 year old position regarding how humans should treat the land: “In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.”

How?

Thinking about protected areas also may lead us to consider a battery of “how”

questions. I think there are at least four worth considering. The first may be “how much?” How much of the world or our small portion of it should be protected from some or all types of human activity?

A glance at Figure 1, the global map of biodiversity and protected areas found on World Resources Institute’s Earthtrends website (<http://earthtrends.wri.org/>), shows just how mistaken are those who contend that environmentalists are succeeding in locking up most of the planet in protected areas. By 2003 only a handful of countries had placed more than 30 percent of their lands in protected areas of one kind or another. Belize (the former British Honduras) stands out – 47.5 percent of its total land area was protected; New Zealand had protected 24.4 percent of its strikingly beautiful landscapes; 15.8 percent of the United States had protected status. Canada, by comparison, only had protected 6.3 percent of its total land area by 2003, significantly less than both the North American (10.9 percent) and the World (10.8 percent) averages.

To a considerable extent, many of the criteria identified in the preceding section, separately or in combination, may be used to decide how much of a nation’s or region’s ecosystems should be or is protected. Biodiversity

conservation is one key to understanding the ambitiousness of Belize's system of protected areas. But, as important as that objective may be in deciding "how much," the following statement shows that country's initiative strives to balance that criterion with others: "Economic, social and ecological sustainability is a prime objective for the system which will seek to optimize socio-economic benefits derived from the system as far as these are compatible with maintaining biodiversity values and sustainable resource management. It will also seek to ensure the equitable distribution of these benefits and public awareness of their importance."

Histories – cultural, social, and economic – are also important to consider when we think about how nations should approach or have approached the "how much" question. Those histories privilege patterns of behaviour that make moving down or staying on the protected areas path more or less difficult.

A second how question to consider is: How do we protect those lands we identify as deserving protection? Or, alternatively, what mechanisms do we select to protect the land? The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides six helpful categories: Ia – Strict nature reserve, Ib – Wilderness area, II – National park, III – Natural monument, IV – Habitat/species management area, V – Protected landscape/seascape, VI – Lands managed

mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems. These categories are managed for different objectives and consequently are less or more open to people and the activities we need or want to pursue. A wilderness area, for example, would be managed mainly for wilderness protection in order to preserve its natural condition. A national park would offer "a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational, and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible."

The aforementioned cultural, social and economic histories likely will complicate decisions about selecting from these types of protected areas possibilities. The history of natural resource exploitation in Alberta, for example, is distinguished by its reverence for existing dispositions and land tenures. This pattern makes it very challenging to set aside protected areas in much of the province since the government's resource development agencies have granted companies the right to exploit resources there. Our settlement history, by allocating virtually all of Alberta's grasslands to agriculture and private ownership makes it, at best, very challenging to pursue landscape protection through the categories outlined by the IUCN. Instead, mechanisms likely must be conceptualized and selected that respect the importance of private ownership.

At least two other "how" questions remain. They deal with process and political mobilization. How should societies decide what areas should be protected? How do we convince our governments to move more assertively on the protected areas file? With respect to the third "how" question my view of the protected areas literature is one where science and scientific research and information are privileged. This strikes me as entirely logical if the only goal of a protected areas strategy is conserving biodiversity. But this may be a blinkered approach to the issue; it ignores a variety of outlooks and non-scientific justifications for protecting areas that merit consideration. An example of these alternative interpretations is found, not surprisingly perhaps, in the aims of Belize's National Protected Area System. There you find room for aesthetics; areas providing "exceptional scenic values" deserve protection. From a process point of view, this perspective demands that the process for deciding what should be protected should be extremely democratic and transparent. Everyone who wants to contribute to those decisions should be ensured the opportunity and resources needed to present their views to decision-makers.

And what of the last "how" question – how do we convince governments to embrace the merit of expanding Alberta's and Canada's protected areas network? A suite of options may be entertained here. From that suite I would select two – one reluctantly, the other enthusiastically. The reluctant selection is to bow to the importance "growth-obsessed" governments devote to the almighty dollar. Conservationists need to expand, to multiply, the recent research looking at the economic value of wilderness/intact landscapes. Prove, in other words, that it makes economic sense to increase the protected percentage of the landscape. The second enthusiastic option bows in the direction of my vocation as a "political scientist" – send emails, write letters, form groups – deliver an avalanche of opinion that election-savvy politicians will not be able to ignore. 🐾



Surveying. Brazilian soapstone 27cmH x 23L x 34W PHOTO: © LORETTA KYLE



PROTECTED AREAS IN ALBERTA – HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

“Protection” of land has long been a focus of environmental organizations such as AWA. But as with any longstanding assumptions, we should question them and ask what we mean when we call for more protected land. What constitutes protection? And how much protection is enough?

Around 12.5 percent of Alberta is protected: 8.5 percent is in federally-protected National Parks and the remainder is under provincial protection. On the surface, this number sounds reasonable.

But there are many different perspectives on what proportion of the land should be protected. The Alberta government recently recommended that the Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council (created under the new Land-Use Framework) should investigate recommending a figure of 20 percent “conserved” land in the Boreal Forest Region. A July 2009 report, *Conservation priorities for the Lower Athabasca Planning Region, Alberta* prepared by Global Forest Watch Canada (see Carolyn Campbell’s article in this issue of the Advocate), established a more ambitious target, recognizing 47 percent of the region as “conservation priority”.

In 1987, the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development recommended in the *Brundtland Report* that, in order to conserve the earth’s ecosystems adequately, the total expanse of protected areas need to be at least tripled. This has been interpreted by many as a protection target of 10 to 12 percent of each of the world’s natural areas, though this figure represents more of a political reality than a scientifically-justifiable fact.

Similarly, in 1992, at its Caracas Congress, the World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas recommended establishing 10 percent of every biome as a general target for protection. But, as Nigel Dudley and Sue Stolton pointed out in a subsequent

Table 1. Protected Areas in Alberta by Natural Region

Natural Region	Area (km ²)	Area protected (km ²)	Percentage protected
Rocky Mountain	49,070	28,514	58.11
Canadian Shield	9,718	1,503	15.47
Boreal Forest	381,047	50,339	13.21
Foothills	66,436	914	1.38
Parkland	60,748	533	0.88
Grassland	95,565	786	0.82
TOTAL	662,587	82,592	12.47

Alberta Community Development figures, June 2005. (Since 2005, 56 km² of protected land in the Parkland region have been designated in the OH Ranch, and Glenbow Ranch).

World Conservation Union (IUCN) discussion paper about protected forests, “if taken in isolation, the 10 per cent target could be a serious underestimate of the area required to guarantee an ecologically representative protected area network.” They note: “Although the total area under protection is important, it may be less significant than other factors including the *ecological representativeness* of the forest under protection, social and environmental functions and the existence of endemics or hotspots.”

This point of *ecological representativeness*, or “representivity” is important. Although 12.5 percent of Alberta is protected, for example, this protection is not distributed evenly across the province’s numerous and diverse landscape types (see Table 1).

While the Rocky Mountain Region is relatively well protected (58.11 percent), principally because of the federally-protected National Parks, the same cannot be said for the adjacent Foothills Region. Only 1.38 percent of the

Foothills is protected. The picture is even dimmer for the Parkland and Grassland Regions; a miniscule 0.88 percent and 0.82 percent of these respective regions is protected. So, for a rattlesnake struggling to survive on the degraded grasslands of southeastern Alberta, it is little consolation that Banff, Jasper, and Waterton National Parks do a relatively good job of protecting parts of the Rocky Mountains.

When it comes to protection we also must realize that Alberta’s six Natural Regions are sub-divided into 21 Subregions. The Rocky Mountain Region, for example, includes the Alpine, Subalpine and Montane Subregions. Protecting land in the Montane Subregion will do nothing to benefit rare alpine plants which require the unique conditions found out in the high altitude Alpine Subregion.

The Alberta government recognized this challenge to protecting landscapes when it launched its Special Places program in the 1990s. Special Places set preservation targets for each of the 174

Table 2. Alberta's Special Places Targets and Results for the Foothills, Parkland, and Grassland Natural Regions

Natural Region	Theme 1 targets (km ²)	Theme 1 targets (% of Natural Region)	Area protected (km ²)	Percentage of Theme 1 target protected
Foothills	1,835	2.76	914	49.8
Parkland	1,775	2.92	533	30.0
Grassland	2,232	2.34	786	35.2

See Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, *Level 1 Theme Targets*, http://tpr.alberta.ca/parks/managing/pdfs/theme_targets.pdf (accessed July 21 2009)

Level 1 natural history themes across the province's 21 subregions. These targets, according to the Alberta Tourism Parks and Recreation website, were designed to meet only the protection targets of the parks and protected areas network. Considering additional uses for outdoor recreation, tourism and other economic activities, would require the targets to be "adjusted upward."

But even the very modest (less than 3 percent in some regions) protection targets of Special Places have still not been met in Alberta (see Table 2). Today, the need for increased protection in the Foothills, Parkland and Grassland Natural Regions is as pressing as ever.

What is Protection?

Protection, of course, means different things to different people. Initiatives to improve protection of land in the Bighorn or the Castle have often provoked alarmist reaction from those who loudly declaim any attempts to "shut them out." Despite the fact that Alberta government figures suggest that Alberta's protected areas contribute a staggering \$2.7 billion in economic activity, politicians in Alberta still oppose protection of land as "sterilization" of the landscape. The Yellowstone to Yukon initiative has often been wrongly, and nonsensically, chided for aspiring to turn the whole region into one gigantic "park." It has never called for any such thing.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN), defines a protected area as: "An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural

resources, and managed through legal or other effective means." This broad definition certainly does not imply that there is no place for human activity in protected areas.

Roughly two thirds of Alberta is Public Land, managed by the province on behalf of Albertans. Protection, in this context, means legislated protection under a range of different designations (see Table 3). Protection of privately owned land - through conservation easements, management agreements or just good old-fashioned sensitive management - will be discussed in a future edition of the *Wild Lands Advocate*.

There are at least ten protected area designations within the province (see Table 3) which vary considerably in their level of protection. The province's three Wilderness Areas were designated to "protect their unique beauty and natural character, and to safeguard them from infringement, development or occupation by man, except as a visitor." The much smaller and more numerous Provincial Recreation Areas, often little more than campgrounds and staging areas, exist primarily to "support outdoor recreation and tourism."

While the Wilderness Area designation seems to offer relative safety from inappropriate industrial activity, the Natural Area designation, judging from the Rumsey Natural Area experience, is much weaker. In Rumsey, one of Alberta's only large Parkland protected areas, industrial fragmentation continues apace. Rumsey provides a salutary lesson that drawing a line on a map and declaring an area protected is not, in itself, going to ensure that biodiversity

or landscape protection goals are met. How that site is managed in the future is critically important, and in many instances, Alberta's management record has been poor.

On the other side of the coin, just because an area is not formally "protected" does not mean that it is badly managed. One need only look at some of the breath-taking fescue grasslands south of Calgary to see that there are many landowners who have done a spectacular job of stewarding the natural values of a landscape, often for many generations.

What do we Protect?

In recent years, AWA has worked to define clearly its Areas of Concern in the province (see Wild Alberta map on page 10). While protected areas (shaded green on the map) make up 12.5 percent of the province, the tan-shaded Wild Spaces represent the best of the rest. Part of the basis for recognition of these *Wild Spaces* is the Alberta government's 1997 report, *Environmentally Significant Areas of Alberta*, which identified 17 percent of provincial land as having international, national or provincial environmental significance.

But even using studies like this, deciding what to protect depends very much on individual priorities. Often, what to protect becomes as much a political as a scientific decision. Protection might be focused on individual species: grizzly bears or woodland caribou are sometimes identified as umbrella species whose protection would also further the protection of numerous other species, although scientific justification for this claim is open to

Table 3. Protected area designations in Alberta

Protected Area	Number	Total Area (ha)	Role
Federal			
National Park	6	5,421,400	“protected for public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment, while being maintained in an unimpaired state for future generations.”
National Wildlife Area	4	46,182	“conserve essential habitat for migratory birds, species at risk and other wildlife.”
Provincial			
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	459,671.04	“established under its own legislation in April 1959; it is similar in intent to wildland parks.”
Wilderness Area	3	100,988.79	“preserve and protect natural heritage, where visitors are provided with opportunities for non-consumptive, nature-based outdoor recreation.”
Wildland Park	32	1,729,868.45	“preserve and protect natural heritage and provide opportunities for backcountry recreation.”
Ecological Reserve	15	26,843.34	“preserve and protect natural heritage and provide opportunities for backcountry recreation.”
Provincial Park	75	220,707.14	“preserve natural heritage; they support outdoor recreation, heritage tourism and natural heritage appreciation activities that depend upon and are compatible with environmental protection.”
Heritage Rangeland	2	12,010.47	“preserve and protect natural features that are representative of Alberta’s prairies; grazing is used to maintain the grassland ecology.”

See Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, *Land Reference Manual*, - <http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/landreferencemanual/default.aspx> (accessed July 21, 2009)

debate. But how do we prioritize species on a “worthiness of protection” scale: is a swift fox more worthy of protection than a Great Plains toad or a snake such as the Eastern yellow-bellied racer? Should aesthetic considerations matter and lead us to protect assertively the species or landscapes (such as seen perhaps at the Siffleur Falls Provincial Recreation Area) we regard as beautiful? Do economic criteria have any place in that type of decision? Should we prioritize species that provide us with economic value?

Where, for that matter, do landscapes of tremendous historical or cultural significance, such as Head-Smashed-in Buffalo Jump, fall on our scale? What about recreational opportunities? Should they be factored into protected area decision-making? And, what about landscapes that provide us with

vital ecological services? As Dudley and Stolton wrote in their 1995 IUCN discussion paper, *The Implications of IUCN’s Protected Area Categories for Forest Conservation*: “The role of protected areas has become as much about the protection of processes - such as supply of water, prevention of erosion and maintenance of human lifestyles - as about the protection of species.”

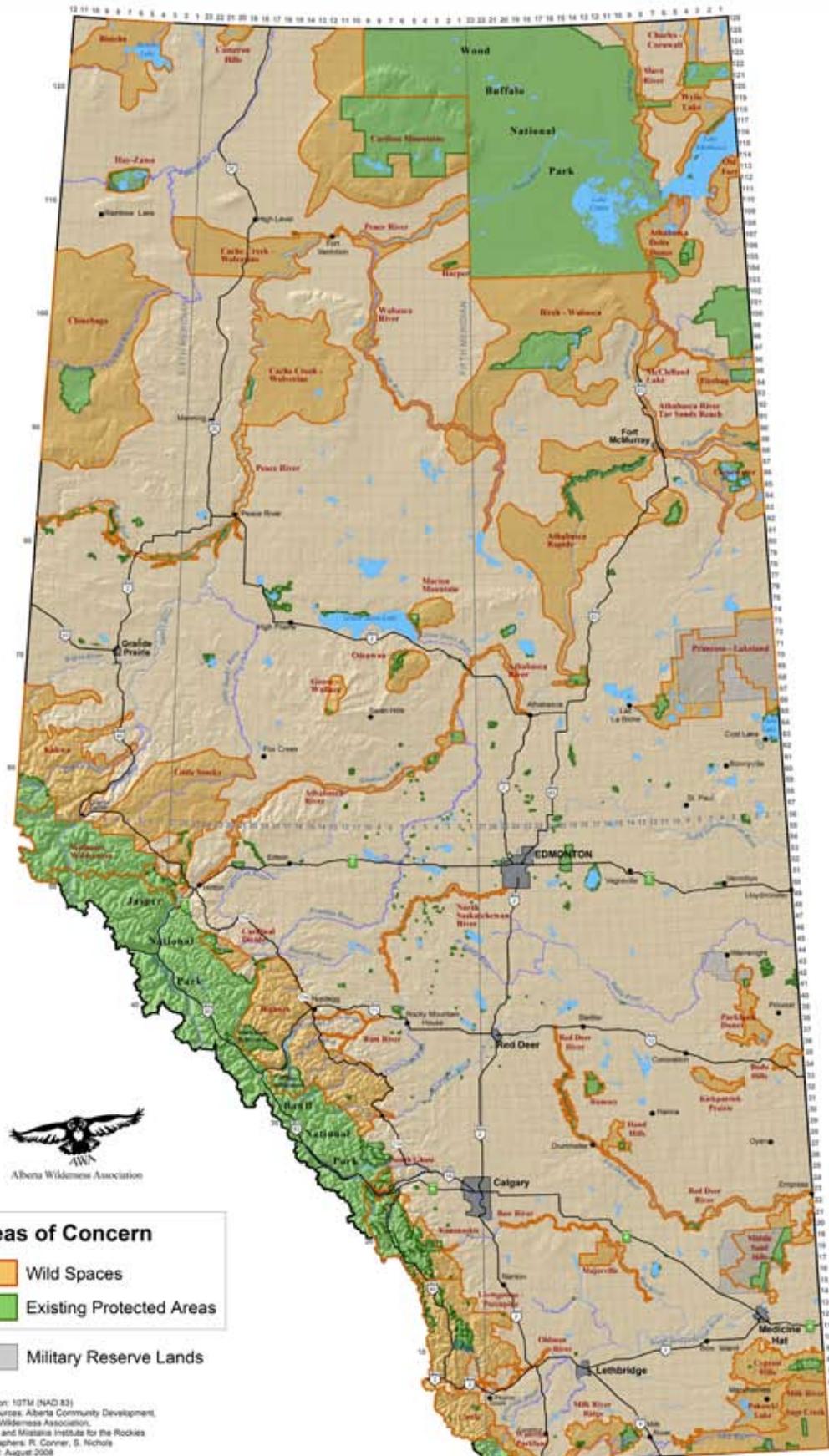
Must Protection be Delivered Through Networks (or Managing the ‘Bits in Between’)?

In his book *Walking the Big Wild*, Karsten Heuer describes how, in 1991, he helped track the movements of a radio-collared wolf named Pluie. Much to everybody’s surprise, her movements took her thousands of miles across Alberta, British Columbia, Montana and Idaho, triggering

a growing realization within Heuer that pockets of protected land would never be adequate to sustain populations of far-ranging carnivores. More and more examples of incredibly wide-ranging wildlife movements in North America were being discovered: “a wolf that wandered from northern Montana to Mile Zero of the Alaska Highway; a lynx that made it halfway to the United States from the southern Yukon; a grizzly bear that walked from one side of British Columbia to the other.” As Heuer points out, “in all cases the animal ignored the boundaries between protected and unprotected lands.”

Similarly, a 1987 *Nature* article by biologist William Newmark detailed a study of fourteen national parks in the western United States and Canada. Newark discovered that 43 percent of his study species had become extinct

Wild Alberta



in the areas he surveyed. Thirteen of the fourteen parks in the study had lost some of their mammals. Since the establishment of Mount Rainier National Park in 1899, for example, fisher, wolverine and lynx had all disappeared.

Since the creation of the first National Parks in the late 1800s, we have come to appreciate that even large islands of protected land may not be enough. "Protected areas should not simply be islands of biodiversity in an otherwise

degraded landscape," emphasized Dudley and Stolton. For this reason, wildlife movement corridors, and transition zones around protected areas, with limited human activity, may be just as important as the protected areas themselves.

Strange as it may sound, in an ideal world there would be no need for protected land. If the whole landscape were managed in a sensitive manner, then natural processes, ecosystems and wildlife populations would be able to

persist without the need for designated parks and protected areas. Of course this is not the reality, certainly not in Alberta, and so protected areas have a critical role to play. While AWA continues to press for more protected areas, particularly in our under-represented landscapes, this comes with a recognition that we need to do a much better job of managing the landscape as a whole including the bits in between the protected areas. 🍄



A GRAND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALBERTA BOREAL FOREST PROTECTION

By Carolyn Campbell, AWA Conservation Specialist

While the classic images of Alberta are of mountains and prairies, the boreal forest is Alberta's largest natural region, comprising 58 percent of the province's area. Worldwide attention on the ecological importance of Canada's boreal forest has recently led to very exciting advances in boreal conservation prospects outside Alberta's borders. There are opportunities within Alberta too if we are bold enough to grasp them: regional land-use planning has started in northeastern Alberta to recommend conservation goals for that section of Alberta's boreal. It's an opportune time to re-examine what should be protected from development in this majestic region.

Canada's boreal forest of 6 million km² is one of the most important intact ecosystems left in the world due to its rich biodiversity, freshwater ecological services, and carbon storage potential. In 2003 First Nations, environmental organizations, corporations and financial institutions, working in consultation with scientists, recognized the boreal's importance through the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework. It states:

"The Framework's goal is to conserve the cultural, sustainable economic and natural values of the entire Canadian Boreal Forest by employing the principles of conservation biology to:

- protect at least 50% of the Boreal in a network of large interconnected protected areas, and

- support sustainable communities, world-leading ecosystem-based resource management and state-of-the-art stewardship practices across the remaining landscape."

The Framework drew on conservation biology and landscape ecology research suggesting that at least 30 to 50 percent of original habitat should be conserved in order to avoid the negative effects of habitat fragmentation on sensitive wildlife populations. It emphasizes the need for conservation-based land-use planning to precede development; also, important ecological functions and cultural values should be maintained by carefully managing lands and waters outside formally protected areas.

In May 2007 the international scientific community endorsed this important boreal forest protection goal. Concerned that only 10 percent of Canada's boreal forest had been protected, while almost 40 percent had been compromised by or scheduled for development, 1,500 scientists from 51 countries, including 400 from across Canada, signed an open letter urging Canada's federal government to support the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework.

Since then there have been some impressive protection gains. For example, the federal government has partnered with First Nations, the NWT government, environmental groups and industry

to follow through on the Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy (PAS). Developed in 1999, the PAS' goals are to protect special natural and cultural areas and core representative areas within each NWT ecoregion. In April 2009, the two west arms of Great Bear Lake received permanent protection, covering 5,600 km² or an area the size of Prince Edward Island. In June 2009 legislation was tabled to increase the size of Nahanni National Park Reserve by 600 percent to over 30,000 km², nearly the size of Vancouver Island.

The provincial governments of Ontario and Québec also have taken significant steps towards realizing the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework goal. In November 2008, Québec Premier Jean Charest unveiled *Plan Nord*, a vision for the 70 percent of Quebec territory north of the 49th parallel. That vision sees half of it protected and the other half developed sustainably. In June 2009, Ontario introduced legislation to commit to protecting at least half, or 225,000 km², of the 'Far North' of Ontario (the Far North constitutes 42 percent of the province). It further committed to establish a First Nations-led planning process to identify both an interconnected conservation area network and priority areas for resource development.

Looking at Alberta's boreal, it is worth recalling that, like other boreal regions, its varied characteristics of



The pitcher plant, identified by biologists as sensitive in Alberta, is found in a few wetland areas in Alberta's boreal. It is adapted to the nutrient-poor soil by digesting insects caught in its tubular liquid-filled leaves. PHOTO: C. OLSON

geology, climate and landforms produce different ecosystems and development pressures. Alberta has eight boreal subregions with diverse features; for example, the Central Mixedwood contains dense white spruce-aspen forests and extensive peat wetlands, while the Peace-Athabasca Delta has grassy sedge meadows and many large and small lakes. The Dry Mixedwood Subregion

(22 percent of Alberta's Boreal Region) along the Peace River valley and in central Alberta has climate and soil suited to agriculture. Over half of it has been cultivated and there are forestry operations in its remaining aspen woods as well as petroleum and coal mining operations. Significant forestry and/or energy industry activities may be found in most other subregions. The Central

Mixedwood (44 percent of the region), for example, includes tar sands mining projects, many in situ tar sands and conventional energy projects, and Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries' enormous Forest Management Agreement area.

Currently, 13 percent of Alberta's boreal region enjoys some form of protection. Wood Buffalo National Park, created in 1922, is by far the largest single protected area. The Alberta section of the Park covers almost 36,000 km²; it alone accounts for 70 percent of Alberta's total protected boreal area. The distribution of Alberta's protected areas in the boreal is listed by subregion in the table on page 13. It is immediately clear that very little of the Dry Mixedwood is protected while a very high percentage of the Peace-Athabasca Delta Subregion is protected.

What should Alberta Protect?

The Boreal Forest Conservation Framework does not prescribe how much Alberta should protect, but rather states that "the goal reflects a national vision, not a formula for adoption in every jurisdiction." It cites factors including existing industrial allocations, land ownership patterns, aboriginal rights and land-use planning as influencing what is possible in a particular region. For thoughts on what and how much Alberta should protect, I asked several colleagues from environmental organizations working, like AWA, on boreal conservation.

Global Forest Watch Canada is an organization that maps, monitors and analyzes development activities within and around Canada's forests. Peter Lee, its Executive Director, states: "Our mapping of ecologically intact forest landscapes clearly demonstrates that, compared to other jurisdictions, Alberta has lost much of its ecologically intact forest landscapes in a short time. This does not bode well for species that require intact forests, such as woodland caribou and some species of boreal birds. It would be worthwhile for Albertans to decide at what point we should retain the remaining intact forest landscapes. Exactly how much to protect is a choice for Albertans to make."

Helene Walsh, Boreal Campaign Director for the Northern Alberta chapter of Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), notes that CPAWS

Alberta Boreal Forest Subregion	Area (000s km²)	% of Alberta's Boreal Forest Region	Designated Protected Areas (000s km²)	% of subregion in Designated Protected Areas
Central Mixedwood	167.9	44	18.8	11.2
Dry Mixedwood	85.3	22	1.3	1.2
Lower Boreal Highlands	55.6	15	3.2	5.9
Northern Mixedwood	29.5	8	13.2	44.8
Athabasca Plain	13.5	4	2.1	16
Upper Boreal Highlands	11.9	3	1.5	12
Boreal Subarctic	11.8	3	5.8	49
Peace-Athabasca Delta	5.5	1	4.3	78
Total	381.0	100	50.3	13

Source: Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre, 2005.

is one of twenty members of the Boreal Leadership Council. Council members (including Suncor Energy and Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries) commit to implementing the national vision of the Framework in their own sphere of activity. "We stand by the Framework's 50 percent conservation goal, and we believe it's possible even in northern Alberta." She emphasizes that large size and representation of all the range of ecosystems is critical, including upland forest 'loggable' areas and a range of south-north areas or corridors. "Don't just protect what is 'easiest,' such as what's farthest from the pulp mill and does not affect the petroleum industry. Connectivity is also crucial to avoid isolating populations and therefore restricting their genetic make-up."

The Pembina Institute also belongs to the Boreal Leadership Council. "There's not an exact right answer to how much should be protected; it depends on how much habitat you're willing or unwilling to lose," says Simon Dyer, Pembina's Oil Sands Program Director. "It also depends on how intensive development is elsewhere in the surrounding landscape. With the intensive industrial uses we see in Alberta, such as in situ and mineable oilsands development, it is becoming

clear that you can't rely on the developed landscape to retain the wildlife that Albertans value. If greater than 50 percent of the landscape is being heavily impacted as is projected by current oil sands lease sales, research shows you will start to see a deterioration in ecological values." Aside from representative, connected landscapes, he adds that habitat for threatened and endangered species including woodland caribou should be explicitly chosen, as well as sites of potential recreational importance to build support for boreal conservation. "In northeastern Alberta there are still areas with fantastic, globally-significant intact ecosystems. Generally, lands not yet allocated are still those most intact—the roadless, undeveloped lands. But given the extent of existing industrial leases, and the lack of planning that has brought us to this situation, the province should also consider compensating leaseholders and extinguishing leases in some high conservation value areas."

World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWF Canada) is also a Boreal Leadership Council member. Rob Powell is Director of their Mackenzie River Basin program. He notes that WWF Canada hasn't recommended a specific boreal protection target for Alberta. To decide

what should be protected, Powell cites the NWT Protected Areas Strategy process as exemplary: "Ask the people who live there, the First Nations, what should be protected to sustain traditional use and cultural sites. Then look at representativeness of ecoregions. Also, the effects of climate change must be considered in establishing a connected network through which animal and plant species can move as conditions change." Powell points to the NWT's Edézhzhie Working Group as having achieved a very thoughtful resource trade-off for a candidate protected area just north of the Alberta-B.C. border. "Only 57 percent of the original candidate area was ultimately endorsed by the group, but that retains 89 percent of the conservation values, while 78 percent of the hydrocarbon and mineral potential in the original candidate area was excluded and is available for future disposition."

What is Good Protection Policy?

Walsh suggests the following as minimum requirements within designated protected areas - protection from further industrial development, including forestry, while hunting, fishing, trapping and traditional uses continue. CPAWS supports some motorized vehicle use

on existing trails for traditional users provided no damage occurs. Outside of protected areas, thresholds should be set on the amount of industrial disturbance at a level that the most sensitive species (such as woodland caribou) can tolerate without population decline. Forestry is appropriate if it meets Forest Stewardship Council standards.

Dyer agrees that industrial development should be excluded from protected areas; he adds that the province's current Wildland Park designation, which excludes new industrial development but supports hunting, fishing, trapping and traditional aboriginal uses, is appropriate for intact boreal lands. He helped develop the Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA)'s June 2008 recommended strategy to address cumulative effects of development in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo: "That work was exceptional in demonstrating that both in situ and mineable oilsands projects are very intensive landscape uses, and that intensive use should be limited. In the case of RM Wood Buffalo, CEMA recommended no more than 14 percent of the landscape should be under intensive industrial use at any time. That's as important as the consensus recommendation to greatly increase the area of protected land."

Good protection, according to WWF Canada's Powell, depends on the purpose and type of designation. It is crucial to have a clear statement of goals and a management plan to accomplish them. "Traditional hunting and trapping are generally appropriate activities in a protected landscape. It's best to

work with traditional users on goals and monitoring for sensitive species." Outside protected areas, he returns to the spectre of climate change. "We're having to rethink what conservation means because of the dramatic forest changes we can foresee with climate change. Pine beetle is just a taste. If the fire cycle changes due to a warming and drying trend, the sustainability of the whole forest changes. We're in the midst of a largely uncontrolled experiment that may have much more impact than any land-use planning decisions we make. So we need to think in terms of the whole landscape, and how interconnected zones may serve to conserve particular ecosystem values."

The Opportunity for Alberta's Northeastern Boreal

Under the Government of Alberta's Land-Use Framework, the land-use planning process now underway for the Lower Athabasca region of northeast Alberta covers 93,000 km², about one quarter of Alberta's boreal region. Today, protected areas cover only 5,890 km² or 6.3 percent of the planning region. In mid-June, environmental organizations learned that the Government of Alberta had asked its Regional Advisory Council (RAC) to test a conservation scenario of 20 percent for the planning region or to demonstrate the feasibility of achieving a higher percentage while meeting economic objectives. It also established the following key criteria for any conservation areas the RAC may recommend: little or no industrial development, supportive of traditional Aboriginal uses, representative of biological diversity, large in size (4,000-

5,000 km²), and they should enable landscape connectivity.

In response, AWA, CPAWS Northern Alberta, Pembina Institute, Federation of Alberta Naturalists and Keepers of the Athabasca asked Global Forest Watch Canada (GFWC) to use its intact forest landscape maps to help identify Lower Athabasca region conservation priority sites. They directed GFWC on thresholds for selecting landscapes that had these key ecological values: species diversity (including trees, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians); coverage of lakes and major rivers; wetland coverage; old growth forest; soil carbon content; net carbon balance; and woodland caribou habitat. GFWC selected these areas, then filled in gaps smaller than 100 km², removed high conservation islands smaller than 50 km², and applied a 1 km buffer. The ensuing report, *Conservation Priorities for the Lower Athabasca Planning Region*, Alberta identified conservation priority areas in 44,075 km² or 47 percent of the planning area. This report and supporting map work was sent to the Lower Athabasca RAC in early July to support their discussions of conservation goals. It can now be found on AWA's website (Issues and Areas-Forests page).

Due to short timelines, that analysis of Lower Athabasca region conservation priority areas has some important gaps. The mapping did not consider fully sites important to aboriginal peoples, small sites of high conservation priority or caribou protection areas. There also was insufficient time to address connectivity, important areas for restoration, recreation areas, or gaps in representative subregions. Work on addressing these gaps will continue this summer. But, as a first cut, the *Conservation priorities* report justifies our view that, even in the highly industrialized northeast, there is a tremendous opportunity to protect nearly half of Alberta's boreal landscape from future industrial development. We will follow the progress of Lower Athabasca land-use recommendations and inform our members of public input opportunities to comment on conservation goals in the northeast we expect to occur this autumn. AWA will continue to advocate strongly for more large interconnected protected areas of Alberta's boreal forest. 🐾



Evidence. 14cmH x 41L x 13W Kisii stone PHOTO: © LORETTA KYLE



DEMONSTRATING THE IMPERATIVE FOR PROTECTION: AWA IN THE BIGHORN

By Ian Urquhart

“Alberta’s Bighorn Backcountry offers spectacular Rocky Mountain scenery and unforgettable recreational opportunities. It’s a world-class attraction, and some rules have been put in place to ensure Bighorn Backcountry retains that natural beauty for generations to come.” Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, 2002.

This past March marked another impressive milestone in AWA’s history. It saw Christyann Olson, AWA’s Executive Director, meet with the Hon. Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, to present the provincial government with the final report of AWA’s five year trail-monitoring project in the Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ). Reading that report, *Is the Access Management Plan Working?: Monitoring Recreational Use in the Bighorn Backcountry*, and reflecting on the nearly forty years of effort AWA has exerted to protect this “world-class attraction” should be a source of pride for members of the Association. The report and our

longstanding concern for the Bighorn underlines some of the most admirable features of what this organization is about – the principled, dogged, reasoned, informed, and participatory approach AWA brings to its wilderness preservation mandate.

Background

I hope long-time members of AWA and readers of the Advocate will forgive a paragraph or two of background information about the Bighorn Wildland for our newer brothers and sisters. The Bighorn sits east of Jasper and Banff National Parks and west of the Forestry Trunk Road. Its roughly 5,000 km² host the headwaters of three river systems

vital to the water many of us drink, the North Saskatchewan, Clearwater, and Red Deer systems. The Bighorn’s conservation importance has been recognized on several occasions in the past. Alberta’s coal policy placed the region off-limits to coal development in 1976; the Eastern Slopes policy of 1977 put most of the Bighorn in the Prime Protection Zone – a zone off-limits to industry and motorized recreational activity. AWA asks no more than for our current government to respect the conservation commitment made by its Progressive Conservative kin thirty years ago to Alberta’s Eastern Slopes – strong protection for 70 percent of that territory. AWA’s nearly 40-year campaign to



Magnificent vistas such as this one await visitors to the Bighorn. PHOTO: R. P. PHARIS.

secure that protection began in 1972 when AWA spearheaded the cleanup of Pinto Lake. Volunteers, most notably the Crossfield junior lacrosse team, stuffed nearly two tons of garbage into burlap sacks that Parks Canada then helicoptered out of the area. Then, as now, AWA sought to secure Wildland Park status for the Bighorn (the status benefiting the Willmore Wilderness Park). In the mid-1980s the Hon. Don Sparrow, the Minister of Forests, was receptive to the Bighorn protection imperative but could not deliver legislated protection to the region (although some protection from motorized recreational access was secured). Until 2002 the prospects for creating a Wildland Park in the Bighorn

were in limbo. Then, in the hands of politicians who regarded protecting landscape as akin to its sterilization, things turned for the worse. This turning appeared, ironically perhaps given government's stewardship responsibilities, in the guise of the Bighorn Access Management Plan, a plan that opened much of the Bighorn to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.

AWA's Bighorn Campaign and the State of Wilderness Policy Making in Alberta

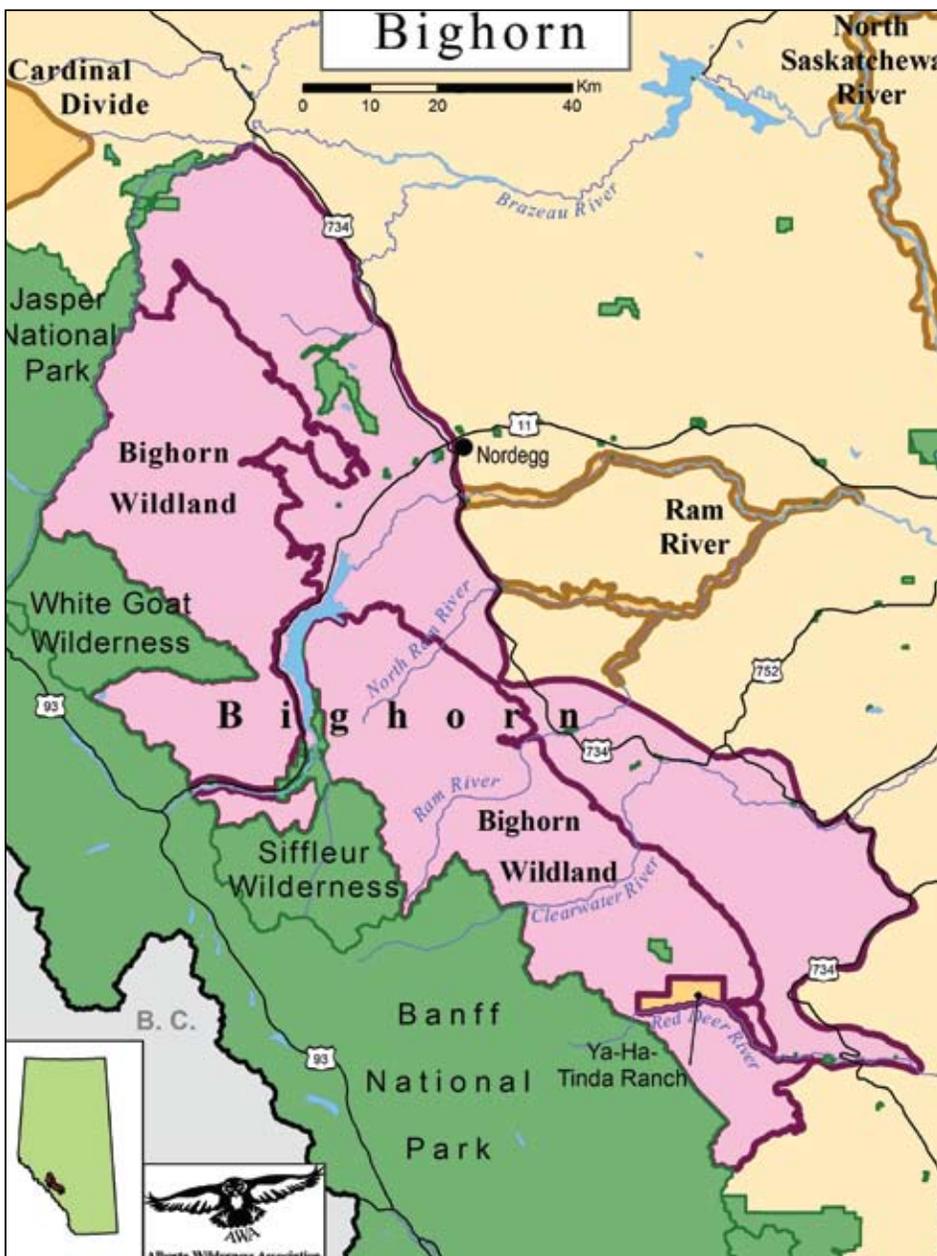
Three important realities of wilderness politics and policy making in contemporary Alberta need to be noted before we look at what AWA's monitoring discovered. These realities encourage,

if not demand, the type of pro-active, hands-on stewardship work reflected in the Association's commitment to the Bighorn and its study of whether the government's access management rules actually work.

The first reality concerns the government's demand for certainty, for hard evidence, before it is prepared to entertain policy change. With respect to environmental issues our world is warming to the "precautionary principle" as the most appropriate guide for dealing with a perennial issue decision-makers face – scientific uncertainty in environmental policy making. This principle encourages policy makers not to postpone their decisions and policy changes until proof or scientific certainty regarding harm is in their grasp. Instead, they should err on the side of caution; be safe, as our parents told us, rather than sorry. This is a world Alberta is very reluctant to be a part of. Instead, government requires concrete evidence of environmental harm before it will entertain, let alone take, action. Until there is greater acceptance of the precautionary principle under "the Dome" in Edmonton we have to be prepared to offer the proof, the certainty, government demands.

What makes it even more incumbent on AWA to take the progressive version of "direct action" shown in our Bighorn campaign is a second reality – government reluctance or refusal – whether for financial or ideological reasons – to undertake the studies needed to determine whether harm exists or whether new users should be invited onto a landscape. It is easy to imagine how maddening it must have been for AWA staff and volunteers to absorb the following pair of circumstances as the government prepared to open up the Prime Protection Zone to OHV use in 2002: certainty and proof is required before government can restrict access to the Bighorn in the name of protection but government agencies do not have and are not gathering the data needed to satisfy that requirement.

Since the Bighorn was opened up to much greater OHV use the government, like AWA, has been monitoring OHV trail use. But arguably AWA's work is in some respects richer and more transparent than the government's; our study provides details on issues like erosion events



The Bighorn Wildland. SOURCE: AWA



OHV damage to the landscape such as this prompted AWA to undertake its 5-year Bighorn monitoring study. PHOTO: AWA STAFF

and illegal off-trail use that should be used to guide policy making. No such data may be found on the government website dedicated to reporting its monitoring activities (<http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fieldoffices/clearwater/bighornbackcountry/monitoring.aspx#graphs>). If government is not going to gather and report such data it becomes incumbent on an organization such as AWA to dedicate some of its scarce resources to provide it.

The third and final reality of contemporary wilderness politics in our province revolves around the word “stakeholder” and the plethora of multi-stakeholder consultation processes we have seen in the last fifteen years. On the one hand, government consulting its public is unquestionably good; but on the other hand, other than countless hours in meetings with the possibility of lunches and per diems, how far has the substance of the conservation agenda been advanced by Alberta’s consultation exercises? With respect to the Bighorn, AWA answered this question by saying “not enough.” So, this reality led AWA to eschew participating in the Bighorn Access Management Plan Monitoring

Group and pour its resources instead into producing the type of systematic, long-term research report you would think a government wedded to the “certainty principle” would need to see.

Do the Rules Work?

As noted above the government promised to establish rules that would retain the Bighorn’s natural beauty for generations to come. AWA selected a somewhat more specific management goal from the government’s access management plan in order to gauge the success of the government’s 2002 policy: “Protect areas containing sensitive resources such as fish & wildlife and their habitats, vegetation, soils and watershed.” Three criteria were then selected to measure management success: recreational impact on and around trails, recreational motorized vehicle activity, and illegal use of trails.

Are the government’s rules living up to these expectations? To answer that question AWA initiated its 2004-2008 monitoring study of recreational activity in the largest Bighorn FLUZ, the Upper Clearwater/Ram. The project cost AWA dearly in terms of time and finances; it

could not have been as thorough as it was without the support received from the Wilburforce and La Salle Foundations as well as the Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Ecotrust, Mountain Equipment Coop, Shell Canada, and the Suncor Energy Foundation.

Recreational use of the trails in the Upper Clearwater/Ram increased over the period covered by AWA’s study. This increased use is captured most dramatically in the number of motorized vehicles using designated trails during the summer months. That growth was explosive over the five-year monitoring period. On the Onion Creek Trail, for example, the total number of vehicles counted by the AWA’s TrafX traffic counters increased from 382 in 2004 to 2,585 in 2008 – an increase of 577 percent. Between 2004 and 2008 the numbers of vehicles counted on the Canary Creek Trail increased by 341 percent (to 1,040 between July 1st and September 10th); 778 vehicles were counted on the Back Trail North in 2008, an increase of 270 percent from the number recorded in 2004.

Unfortunately, these dramatic increases in trail use have led to increased

damage to the landscape in and around designated trails. The growth in the number of Erosion Events (EEs) along designated trails typifies this disturbing trend too well. The EE designation is based on the government's trail integrity standards and is met, for example, when ruts greater than 25 cm in depth extending for more than three metres are discovered. Approximately one EE was recorded for every 600 metres of trail over the 76-kilometre network of designated trails.

Increased damage to the landscape also was seen in the dozens of locations where OHVs avoid water crossing structures when they cross creeks, the proliferation of trails that take users off of the designated trail system, and random campsite footprints covering roughly the same amount of territory as 32 National Hockey League rinks.

And, as if these data were not troubling enough, the TrafX counters make it very clear that the unlawful use of trails in the Upper Clearwater/Ram is on the rise. In 2008 AWA calculated that 15 percent of OHV traffic on trails

flouted the government's regulations. This percentage is little changed from 2004. But this is no cause for celebration since the number of motorized vehicles on these trails has increased dramatically. The data clearly state that more OHV users are ignoring the rules now than was the case in 2004.

When Alberta Sustainable Resource Development unveiled its Bighorn Access Management Plan in 2002 it rather hopefully urged recreational trail users: "Make it a point to **"Stay on the Trail"** and leave no trace of your visit, so that the amount of true wilderness available for your enjoyment in Bighorn Backcountry is not diminished or degraded." AWA's trail monitoring work suggests the existing rules are not realizing this and other expectations contained in the Bighorn Access Management Plan.

Looking Ahead

When Alberta released the Bighorn Access Management Plan it defined therein a wildland as: "A wilderness or back-country setting having a degree of

solitude, low evidence of human presence and a natural landscape." Establishing a suite of policies that would establish a Bighorn Wildland remains AWA's goal. Nine recommendations to take us closer to that goal may be found in the final report of the trail monitoring study. Three of those recommendations are highlighted here. First, motorized recreation must be severely curtailed, in not eliminated altogether, in the Prime Protection Zone if Alberta wants to live up to its declarations about the importance of watershed and wildlife habitat protection. Second, if the Bighorn really is a world-class attraction then it is high time government treated it as such by increasing its enforcement activities in the backcountry. Fines for behaving unlawfully in this attraction should be increased substantially. And third, government should make sure responsible OHV users have the information they need to respect the law – increase signage throughout the Bighorn to insure that responsible users do not inadvertently break the law. 🍷



SAGE-GROUSE COURT VICTORY A MAJOR STEP FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES RECOVERY

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

A landmark court decision offers hope that the endangered greater sage-grouse may have taken the first step on its way to recovery in Canada. The decision may also have major implications for the recovery of other endangered species in the future.

On July 9, a federal court judge in Vancouver ruled that Environment Canada broke the law by refusing to identify critical habitat in a recovery plan for the endangered greater sage-grouse. The lawsuit was filed by Ecojustice in early 2008 on behalf of Alberta Wilderness Association, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Grasslands Naturalists, Nature Saskatchewan and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee.

The decline of the greater sage-grouse in Canada has been well documented (see, for example, the article in the

April 2009 Advocate). Once widespread across the prairies, the species has been listed as endangered since 1998. The bird now survives in remote corners of south-eastern Alberta and south-western Saskatchewan. In Alberta, from an estimated population of 3,000 to 6,000 birds in the late 1960s, sage-grouse numbers have fallen dramatically. Down to just 84 males on leks (traditional courting sites) in 2008, numbers continue to drop; only 66 males were counted on leks in the spring of 2009, a precipitous 20 percent drop in just the last year.

Sage-grouse habitat has shrunk to around 6,000 km² in Canada, just six percent of the species' historic range. According to the federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), the causes of the decline are well known: "the loss,

fragmentation and degradation of its native grassland habitats through oil and gas exploration, overgrazing and conversion to crops." Without habitat protection, according to Ecojustice, sage-grouse will disappear from Alberta within six years.

Central to the successful court action was the refusal of the federal sage-grouse recovery strategy to identify critical habitat, despite the fact that the 2003 Species at Risk Act requires habitat to be identified "to the extent possible, based on the best available information." Critical habitat for sage-grouse is well known. A peer-reviewed study by leading sage-grouse scientist Dr. Mark Boyce clearly identifies critical habitat for nesting and brood-rearing. Yet Ottawa would not recognize the value of that research and, citing a lack of scientific

information, refused to designate critical habitat.

The environmental groups argued in court that the Minister had ample evidence to identify critical habitat. The judge agreed; he stated it was “unreasonable” for the government to claim it could not identify breeding grounds when knowledge of their locations was “notorious.” He pointed out that the federal government was seeking too high a threshold for identifying critical habitat, suggesting they are seeking “precision or exactitude” whereas the law requires the “best available information.” He also made it clear that designating critical habitat is not discretionary: it is a requirement the Minister must follow.

Beyond Sage-grouse

AWA hopes Ottawa does not appeal this decision and that this successful court challenge will also have positive implications for future recovery of all endangered species in Canada. Justice Zinn underlined that critical habitat must be identified in all endangered species recovery strategies. “There is reason to believe endangered species across Canada will finally receive protection with federal courts forcing the government to obey its own laws,” says AWA Past President Cliff Wallis.



Standing tall with tail fanned and white neck feathers raised in a ruff, a male greater sage-grouse will display on his breeding ground. He will inflate and compress air sacs in his throat to create loud popping sounds. Males are known to display for several weeks while the female will visit only for a short time to mate. Dancing grounds or lek sites are a critical part of the habitat greater sage-grouse depend on. PHOTO: C. OLSON

Ecojustice executive director Devon Page agrees. “We won’t go away,” he says. “If they continue to ignore the law, we will continue to hammer them in the courts and this case will be a powerful tool for the protection all of Canada’s species at risk, including caribou, killer whales and polar bears.”

Next steps

Sage-grouse are certainly not safe yet: identifying critical habitat is only the first step. Designating critical habitat, of course, will not make the birds better off. It is only when the habitat starts to be protected from inappropriate agricultural and industrial activity that the grouse will have a chance of recovering. Time is not on their side. “Protecting habitat is the most important thing we can do to help the recovery of species at risk,” says Dr. Boyce, “and for the sage-grouse this needs to be done now.”

AWA believes that all new industrial activity in critical sage-grouse habitat must be halted immediately. In the longer term, there is an urgent need to set aside large blocks of grassland as protected areas, including the area south of Cypress Hills in south-eastern Alberta. The federal Species at Risk Act acknowledges that 86 percent of Canada’s 449 species at risk are in this situation because of loss or degradation of habitat. Rather than being dragged kicking and screaming through every step of the recovery process, the federal and provincial governments should be working together to identify and protect sage-grouse habitat as an urgent priority. This magnificent prairie wildlife icon deserves no less. 🐾



Air. 39cmH x 38cmW x 48cmL Kisii stone. PHOTO: © LORETTA KYLE



CARIBOU AND WOLVES IMPERILED BY GOVERNMENT IMPOTENCE

By Christyann Olson, AWA Executive Director

In 1978, provincial biologists in conjunction with AWA and other Alberta conservation groups wrote the “*Caribou Management Outline for Alberta*”. That report’s major recommendations included:

- funds and resources must be allocated to ensure the protection of woodland caribou;
- wolf control must not be considered until a recovery program focusing on the cause of the caribou decline has been enacted;
- the government must no longer delay action that would reverse the long-term causes of caribou decline;
- a province-wide ban on hunting caribou must be initiated;
- a regional access management plan for industry and recreation must be created.

It is fair to say that despite the ongoing commitment and tenacity of AWA and others, thirty-one years later, we have not made much progress on these ideas and recommendations. While we no longer have a hunting season for caribou, we have been culling wolves,

and plans for the protection and now recovery of caribou have stalled. The situation seems to be one characterized by government impotence, inaction, or inertia – take your pick.

Lindsey Wallis’ article “Caribou herd set to disappear” appeared in Calgary’s *fast forward weekly* on July 2, 2009.

There she reveals the most recent assault on efforts to protect caribou and exposes a hard-hitting reality. When it comes to caribou protection the provincial government has been inactive, impotent.

Wallis reported that with the 80 member Little Smoky herd on the verge of extirpation the government agreed to implement a recommendation from the Alberta Caribou Committee. It will map intact caribou habitat that needs protection. But environmentalists quoted in the article warn that this piece of good news (alas, unless you are a member of the Little Smoky herd) is not as promising as they would like it to be. They claim industry drew the map to exclude large tracts of intact pine forest. Helene Walsh, boreal campaigner for CPAWS Northern Alberta speculated that “the province is using the ‘faulty map’ to approve a

20-year logging plan in the intact pine forest in the Little Smoky.”

Dave Ealey, a spokesperson for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, acknowledged to Wallis that the map is deficient and said there needs to be “further refinements.” “We need a model we can use with all parties so they can play a part in restoration,” he said. “I can sense the frustration and I appreciate the concern. But we want to get this right. It’s a very complex process, we have a lot of things to do.”

Caribou in Alberta, like many of their global cousins, are in trouble. As Nigel Douglas reported in the June issue of the *Advocate* the North Banff caribou herd likely was wiped out by an April avalanche. What the Alberta government needs to do with respect to helping caribou recover was clearly presented in the 1978 recommendations. Such clarity should not have produced the years of impotence we, and Alberta’s caribou, have suffered through. How much longer will it be before Alberta does what Mr. Ealey says needs to be done?

In light of this arguably tragic record of impotence AWA refuses to support further wolf control measures. Any support for some wolf control action always was conditional on the government acting on the habitat protection front. To continue to offer some support for wolf control while Edmonton refuses to act on the habitat front would be tantamount to supporting a scenario threatening to two species – wolves and caribou.

Please take a few minutes to phone or write Premier Stelmach and the Honourable Ted Morton, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, to let them know that our threatened caribou herds deserve immediate action. Urge them to take a political version of Viagra or Cialis to deal with this very sad case of government impotence. 🐾



Caribou face a multitude of stressors and threats. Little has been done to measure the cumulative impacts of forestry, oil and gas, coal mining and motorized recreation. Serious legislated protection is needed for woodland caribou to recover. PHOTO: R. SLOAN

ASSOCIATION NEWS: DONATIONS AND DEFENDERS

AWA is grateful for all our members and supporters who find ways to support us through their daily work and life. The photos below are two wonderful examples of the ways folks like you help us defend wild Alberta.



AWA staff was thrilled to be part of a recent assembly and presentation at Sunnyside School. The school, the parents, teachers and children, together with children's entertainer Peter Puffin held a concert to launch their school song. They donated the funds they raised to help AWA save grizzly bear habitat. Shown here are Peter Puffin and Sunnyside Principal, Sandy Trumper, presenting the cheque to AWA Executive Director, Christyann Olson. In the background is AWA's grizzly bear mascot on one of his first outings! PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS



Kinder Morgan staff, Fiona Mulvenna and Karen Thompson, presented \$700 to AWA's Carolyn Campbell to support summer trail work in the Bighorn. The funds were raised as part of the Commuter Challenge, an environmental awareness program Kinder Morgan held during Environment Week. PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS

JAMES TWEEDIE AND JUDY HUNTLEY – DEFENDERS OF ALBERTA’S SOUTHWEST WILDERNESS

By Vivian Pharis based on an interview by Courtney Townsend

We won! We won! The words burst out of the open AWA door loud enough to alert all of Calgary. They were meant to be heard all the way to the Crownsnest Pass. They came roaring from the be-whiskered mouth of a man who was near to exploding with excitement. Such a win had been anticipated for decades, was hugely deserved, and demanded to be shouted from the rooftops.

It was September 6, 1994 and James Tweedie had just learned that the Energy and Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) had refused Amoco Canada a permit that would have initiated a sour gas drilling program in the pristine, highly picturesque Whaleback, just a stone’s throw from his Southwest Alberta home.

James and his life partner of some 35 years, Judy Huntley, were seasoned conservation warriors when around 1990 they organized what is perhaps Alberta’s first effective landowner-rancher-conservationist network. The groups worked harmoniously to jointly oppose Amoco’s application at a formal ERCB hearing. By 1990 Judy was totally immersed in environmental work, serving

on the Board of Directors of both the Alberta Environmental Network and the Canadian Environmental Network, but she still found time for local, grassroots organization. Working in her own back yard, she fostered good relationships between landowners and conservationists that made it possible to jointly oppose Amoco. Winning the Whaleback’s freedom from industrial servitude was, for James and Judy, a culmination of decades of what often seemed like hopeless struggles to keep parts of the world they knew best in a peaceful, beautiful and naturally intact state.

The part of the world James and Judy had come to know best and found worth fighting for was Southwest Alberta – Waterton Lakes National Park, the Castle River headwaters and the Oldman River. This is all strikingly beautiful country, but also country under many industrial and developmental pressures. That these lands retain much of their beauty and remain reasonably intact is in no small part due to the tireless efforts of these two provincial immigrants.

James and Judy arrived in Alberta in 1972, young and idealistic. They

came to work on a Waterton area cattle ranch for the winter and fell in love with the local splendour. Judy had previously succumbed to the spell of Alberta’s mountains from spending eight summers camping and horseback riding in the headwaters of the Oldman River and parts of Banff National Park. Having met at the University of British Columbia while pursuing degrees in anthropology, the two arrived in Alberta as almost seasoned combatants in defence of human rights, First Nations peoples and disappearing wilderness. They had been activists at the UBC, and continue to be so to this day, standing up for those things they hold most precious; things like ancient forests, wild places, intact nature, local responsibility and sustainable communities.

The early years of their Alberta life were spent on a property south of Pincher Creek. It was a great jumping-off place from which to explore the Waterton and South Castle areas, and they became intimately familiar with the complexities of the region. Not all of the complexities they learned about, however, involved beauty and nature appreciation. James and Judy were becoming increasingly disturbed by growing industrial intrusions into the area they had come to know and love.

There was already a large sour gas plant within two miles of their home and drilling was happening all around them, even high into Eastern Slopes valleys on the edge of the national park. Mining, logging, resort development and off-road vehicles presented more public land issues. James and Judy soon joined the Alberta Wilderness Association, an organization which arose in the Pincher Creek area because of these same land and wildlife habitat threats. AWA had identified key lands it wanted protected in the South Castle headwaters, lands that had once been part of Waterton Lakes National Park. James and Judy



James and Judy in their beloved Whaleback in 2003 at the site where Polaris Energy proposed to drill for sour gas. The EUB rejected the application. PHOTO: J.L. LAWSON



Turn Away. 8"H x 7"W x 12.5"L Serpentine. PHOTO: © LORETTA KYLE

took up this cause as local activists and Judy joined the AWA Board of Directors, remaining there four years.

Realizing that living near a sour gas plant would not be a healthy place to raise their two children, James and Judy found a lovely property at Maycroft on the south bank of the Oldman River, west of Highway 22 and moved there in 1983. Their move to Maycroft put them in a strategic position when the Alberta Government announced it was building the controversial dam on the Oldman River. The two became key local players in protracted opposition to the dam, the construction of which James and Judy call "one of the greatest catastrophes in the history of Alberta." AWA, Friends of the Oldman River (FOR) and many local people fought the dam through lobbying, massive demonstrations and legal action, winning support even at the Supreme Court, but finally failing to stop construction. Today, the dam stands as a monument to government obstinacy, but since its construction no other dams have been built in Alberta.

By the late 1980s, James and Judy were seasoned conservation activists in a province with a growing history of industrial supremacy and governments that catered to development. They had become hard-nosed themselves as a result of so many battles to protect lands where democracy and fairness were precluded, even from official proceedings as those of the Energy and Resources Conservation

Board. But what resulted from one such hearing left James and Judy stunned, horrified and very disheartened that both their government and the oil and gas industry could and would run rough-shod over the public and the environment in their endless quest for resource exploitation.

The 1988 ERCB hearing involved a drilling program Shell Canada wanted to develop for the top of Corner Mountain or Prairie Bluff Mountain near Pincher Creek. The mountain had once been in the park system and was within the South Castle River headwaters. It was also zoned by the province as off limits to industry and motorized use and Shell's program had initially been rejected by the Deputy Minister in charge. However, Shell met with a key Minister behind closed doors and gained permission to proceed. AWA called for an ERCB hearing which was granted, but the organization was denied a slight delay that would have allowed a key technical witness to attend and argue that the drilling target could be reached from below the mountain by directional drilling. Shell was granted permission to drill from above and to construct a horrendous road up the side of the mountain, leaving a scar that will remain for centuries.

AWA organized a mountain-top demonstration as the road and wellsites were being bulldozed into place. Shell's work was held up for about a week

but the company was soon granted an unprecedented injunction to keep all the public off the mountain entirely. AWA president Vivian Pharis was served with a \$100,000 Statement of Claim and several key protesters, including James Tweedie, were named in the SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation). An embittered James said the experience was a "horrible, horrible thing that unraveled the entire focus of the Eastern Slopes Policy, and was meant to prevent people from carrying out their legal activism on behalf of public lands."

But the experience also steeled James and Judy's resolve for more battles, some of which they would go on to win, like the one to save the Whaleback. Some battles are ongoing, and their continued participation is testimony to the ongoing strength and determination of these two eco saviours. These battles include their work for the goals of the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition, a group they helped found.

Seeing the need for a local group to address public land issues in the South Castle headwaters and to work directly for its protection, James and Judy have worked towards its goals for several decades. The *Crown* in the organization's name represents "Crown of the Continent" – an initiative to see



Mating Dance. 23cmH x 17L x 12W Serpentine. PHOTO: © LORETTA KYLE

the lands of the larger area that includes the International Peace Park, the upper Flathead of B.C. and the Castle River headwaters of Alberta, being protected as one large, continuous ecosystem. Although the Castle headwaters were named as a “Special Place,” called the Castle Special Management Area in 2002, it remains unprotected by legislation. James is the CCWC’s current conservation director and Judy is its executive director. Their work, and that of the CCWC, is not yet finished.

Judy still acts on behalf of AWA too, as steward of the Beehive Natural Area in the headwaters of the Oldman River, a beloved place she first roamed through as a child.

For these two there is no question or doubt about why they do what they do; it is clear to them. “I am here to try and protect some things that don’t have a voice,” says James. “Wilderness protection is about giving a voice to those who can’t speak. We work on these things here, with the resources we have, just as other AWA people apply their skills to



Participants in AWA’s 2009 Whaleback hike learn about the 1994 Amoco hearing at the site where the company proposed to drill for natural gas. PHOTO: I. URQUHART

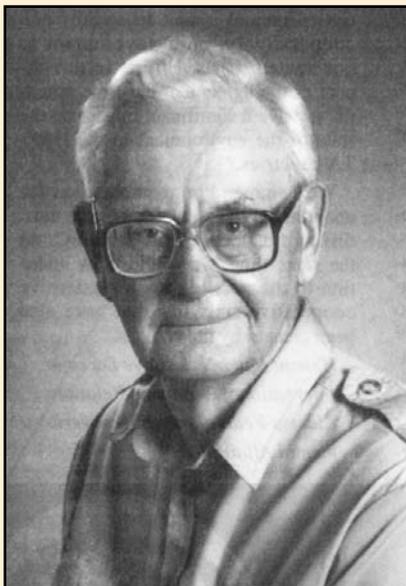
protect places precious to them.”

“We live our lives walking in beauty. That’s how it is.” They also live their lives protecting this beauty and the rest of us owe them our gratitude.

James and Judy will receive a Wilderness and Wildlife Defender’s award on November 20, 2009. 🐾

IN MEMORIAM

DR. WILLIAM A. (BILL) FULLER
June 13, 2009 at the age of 85 years



Too many people pass away who I wish I could say I knew very well – Dr. Bill Fuller was such a man. Like too many academics I have met from the “hard” sciences faculties at the University of Alberta my contacts with Bill were all-too-brief. But, they were memorable. When Larry Pratt and I wrote our book about the industrialization of Alberta’s boreal forest I interviewed Bill about the government’s plans. Bill was a remarkable source of information for our work. The insights he offered – both his professional ones as one of Canada’s leading biologists and his activist ones as an “intellectual heavy weight” who opposed the Alberta-Pacific project – strengthened our analysis significantly. With respect to the Al-Pac hearings Bill demonstrated just how influential individuals may be in the public

policy process. The depth of his scientific knowledge and his contacts with scientists on both sides of the issue (many of whom were taught by Bill) clearly encouraged the review panel to recommend against building the Alberta-Pacific pulp mill. His scientific expertise, especially with respect to the north and its ecology, as well as his passion for environmental conservation led many national and international committees to seek his advice and counsel over the years. Alberta Wilderness Association was privileged to award Bill a “Alberta Wilderness Defenders” award in 2003 – in recognition of the positive role Bill played with respect to promoting the conservation agenda. His knowledge, passion, and empathy will be missed greatly.

- Ian Urquhart

Hunting Sandhill Cranes

The June 2009 *Advocate* mentioned proposals before the Alberta government to introduce a hunting season for sandhill cranes. AWA is pleased to confirm that, following considerable public opposition, the proposals have been rejected. Although AWA has no objection to hunting when it is demonstrably sustainable, we doubt this would in fact be the case with sandhill cranes. Furthermore, introducing a sandhill crane hunt also would increase the possibility of accidentally killing the highly endangered whooping crane.

Congratulations to Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton for a bold and well-considered decision made in the face of considerable pressure to institute a hunt. And thank you to those people who took the time to write to Minister Morton to oppose this proposal. In a June 8 letter to the *Calgary Herald*, Grade 8 Math teacher Emily Brown, whose students wrote to Minister Morton to oppose the hunt, congratulated the minister on his decision: "My students will be so relieved and will now, perhaps, have a sense that a citizen can have a say in government decision-making and that perhaps their impassioned letters made a difference." Hear-hear. We hope that future decisions from Minister Morton justify Ms. Brown's optimism.

- Nigel Douglas

Sir Winston Churchill Park – The More Islands the Merrier!

Alberta may soon be blessed with a provincial park of islands. Alberta Parks is seeking public input this summer on a proposal to add all eight islands in the east basin of Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park (SWCP). This Park is in northeastern Alberta, 11 km from the town of Lac La Biche.

Tom Maccagno – retired lawyer, former mayor of Lac La Biche, life-long naturalist, and nearly that long a member of AWA – spearheaded this initiative. "Provincial Park status will give these unique islands the highest level of protection," says Maccagno. "Instead of just an island park, namely, Sir Winston

Churchill Park, Albertans and others will have a park of islands to respect and enjoy."

When Maccagno initiated this proposal in spring 2008 he focused on six unprotected islands. He documented the high botanical significance of Birch Island, one of the most diverse sites in northern Alberta for species of rare moonwort ferns. As well, migratory bird, wildlife habitat, and low impact recreational opportunities issues figured in his initiative.

Last summer AWA and many other stakeholders supported Tom Maccagno's proposal. Alberta Parks then suggested incorporating High Island and Black Fox Island, two existing Natural Areas, into the SWCP expansion proposal. Maccagno and AWA readily supported this initiative. By consolidating all the islands into a single provincial park one management plan will address both conservation needs and recreation potential. After consulting other departments over the winter Alberta Parks launched a two month public consultation period on the park expansion proposal in June 2009.

AWA salutes our friend Tom Maccagno, and others who have worked on this cause, for bringing this vision so close to accomplishment. We encourage members to support this proposal by registering their views on the Parks

website at <http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/parks/consult> (Boundary Amendments section). Public comments must be submitted by August 14.

- Carolyn Campbell

Climate Change: Warning Signals for North America's Very Big and Very Small Mammals

Recent reports highlight some of the effects climate change may have on two very different wildlife species in North America.

In an article in the May 2009 *Journal of Wildlife Management*, Mark Lenarz et al looked at annual moose survival rates in Northeastern Minnesota. As temperatures rise, moose raise their metabolic rate to regulate body temperature. January temperatures above a certain threshold had a direct effect on subsequent moose survival rates. The report concluded: "We expect that continuation or acceleration of current climate trends will result in decreased survival, a decrease in moose density, and ultimately, a retreat of moose northward from their current distribution."

Also in May 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service launched a review to determine whether the pika, a small alpine relative of the rabbit, should be protected under the Endangered Species



The pika could turn out to be the canary in the gold mine when it comes to the effects of climate change on wildlife populations. PHOTO: C. WERSCHLER

Act. This announcement followed a 2007 petition and subsequent legal challenge by the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD).

Pikas cannot tolerate high temperatures; they may die from overheating when exposed to temperatures of as low as 78 degrees Fahrenheit for just a few hours. As temperatures increase, pika populations seek refuge at higher and higher altitudes; eventually, of course, they simply run out of mountain. According to CBD: “More than a third of documented pika populations in the Great Basin mountains of Nevada and Oregon have gone extinct in the past century as temperatures warm, and those that remain are found an average of 900 feet further upslope.”

Pika in Alberta are listed as secure. Although the Alberta government recognizes that “our planet is warming at a rate unprecedented in our recorded history,” there are no current plans to re-evaluate their status and that of other species likely to be affected by climate change.

- Nigel Douglas

McClelland Lake: Bitumen Upgrading Trumps a Conservation Possibility

Whatever one might think about the state of the environment in Alberta there is no shortage of positive claims and promises

from the provincial government. Take, for example, last February’s release of *Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta’s Oil Sands*. This document outlined the government’s 20-year vision for “sustainable and responsible growth” in the oil (tar) sands. Soothing phrases are abundant there. Readers are promised

that the plan “provides a platform to balance development with environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic success.” The vision commits to “(i)ncrease conservation and protected areas to maintain biodiversity in the oil sands regions.”

Less than six weeks after this commitment the government gave Albertans cause to question just how serious this new-found commitment really was. Such doubt arose from the province’s decision about the status of the Fort Hills oil sands lease – a lease that threatens to turn the McClelland Lake wetland complex – and its remarkable patterned fen – into the moonscapes we have so far seen left behind by tar sands mining. Events during the fall and winter of 2008/09 saw Alberta pass up a golden opportunity to inject real substance into its talk about a vision for protected areas in the oil sands region.

In November 2008 the Fort Hills Energy Ltd. Partnership postponed plans to exploit the bitumen in the Fort Hills lease. This postponement gave Alberta two opportunities: take the lease back from the companies and offer protected areas status to the McClelland Lake wetland complex – opportunities consistent with the original integrated resource management plan for the region.

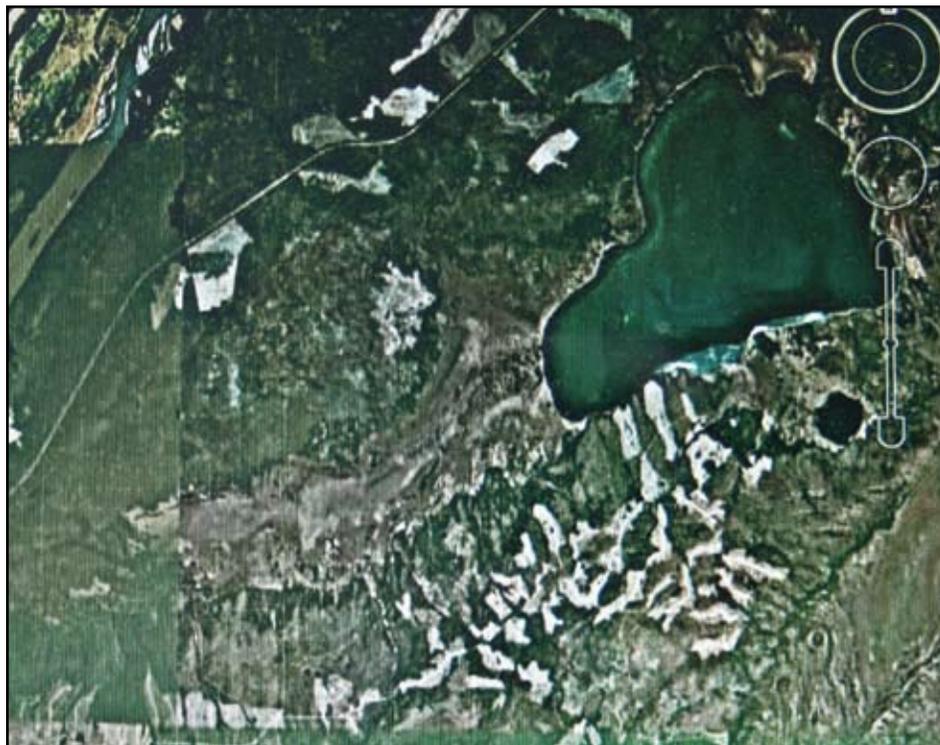


Figure 3: Google Earth image of McClelland Lake from an altitude of 17.8 kilometres, 2009. IMAGE © 2009 DIGITALGLOBE, IMAGE © 2009 TERRAMETRICS, © 2009 TELE ATLAS © 2009 GOOGLE



Figure 2: Google Earth image of McClelland Lake from an altitude of 17.8 kilometres, 2006. IMAGE © 2006 TERRAMETRICS, © 2006 GOOGLE

Rather than seize these opportunities and show Albertans that protected areas really do have a future in the oil sands region the government opted to re-negotiate and extend the Fort Hills lease. In exchange for a promise from the partnership to upgrade the lease's bitumen in Alberta the government effectively excused Petro-Canada, Teck Cominco, and UTS Energy from the original development commitments contained in the initial lease.

It might be too much to hope for but Suncor's takeover of Petro-Canada gives Rick George's company a wonderful opportunity to walk the talk Suncor has uttered about protected areas in the boreal (as a signatory to the Canadian Boreal Initiative Suncor approved the goal of placing at least 50 percent of Canada's boreal forest in a network of protected areas and conservation zones).

Time for meaningful action is, at best, short. Compare the images in Figures 2 and 3, courtesy of Google Earth, downloaded in 2006 and 2009. The first image shows a relatively intact McClelland Lake wetland complex, albeit one scarred by the systematic drilling needed to evaluate the underground bitumen resource. But, look at the south/southwestern portions of the complex less than three years later. The landscape in Figure 3 has been mauled by dozens of clearcuts, some extending nearly to the edge of McClelland Lake itself.

- Ian Urquhart

Commission on Environmental Cooperation Urged to Reinvigorate Grasslands Work

Alberta Wilderness Association is urging the Commission on Environmental Cooperation to reinvigorate the Commission's work on grassland biodiversity conservation (the CEC was created by Canada, the United States, and Mexico under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation). The Commission's 2009 operational plan devoted only \$150,000 to grasslands work. While this money supports an important goal – building capacity for grasslands biodiversity conservation in northern Mexico – AWA feels that more work needs to be done, more quickly.

This call to put more of the Commission's limited resources into grasslands work coincides with the

release of a disturbing report from the World Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative in July. That report, *What are Global Temperate Grasslands Worth?: A Case for Their Protection*, underlined just how little we know about the economic value of temperate grasslands. These grasslands, the most altered ecosystem on Earth, have the added unfortunate distinction of generally being the most threatened ecosystem in most of the nations where they may be found. The Initiative argues that, despite being under such great threat, "our understanding of the full monetary value of the goods and services provided by natural temperate grasslands is virtually nonexistent."

Threats to temperate grasslands continue to grow apace. Biofuels, poorly designed wind and solar energy projects, and natural gas/coalbed methane extraction ambitions all may put greater pressure on North America's grasslands.

AWA takes some encouragement from Environment Minister Jim Prentice's response to our call for further action. The Minister has pledged to take AWA's position "into consideration as we move forward with our deliberations on the next Strategic Plan over the coming months."

- Christyann Olson/Ian Urquhart

Stronger Federal Action urged on Tar Sands' Water Impacts

Late spring saw two different calls for Ottawa to take stronger action concerning the impacts of Alberta's tar sands projects on water and fish habitat. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development held hearings in May to study "Oil Sands and Canada's Water Resources". Industry, scientists, First Nations and environmental organizations appeared before the Committee. Witnesses presented compelling evidence there about the risks posed to water resources and habitat from oil sands projects. Some urged Ottawa to use the tools it already has to better manage water withdrawals and reduce environmental hazards. The Committee is expected to report this fall.

That month also saw the federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development release his audit of how well Ottawa was performing its fish habitat responsibilities. Serious

gaps were identified. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) lacks the data needed to ascertain whether the habitat policy's objective of a net gain in fish habitat is being achieved. Additionally, DFO could not demonstrate to the auditors that projects threatening fish habitat have been assessed adequately. Furthermore, we should be shocked by the auditor's discovery that DFO rarely monitors whether project proponents actually comply with their conditions of approval. In addition, the auditors concluded that the Canada-Alberta Administrative Agreement for the Control of Deposits of Deleterious Substances was out of date and not being fully implemented. The Commissioner found this very problematic given the risks to fish habitat posed by tar sands tailings ponds.

DFO and Environment Canada accepted all of the auditor's recommendations and committed to implement them (sometimes, though, not until several years from now). This arguably positive response is inadequate since recommendations from previous audits have not been implemented. That sorry history demands a more serious, committed response in 2009 from federal environmental protection agencies.

- Carolyn Campbell

Caw Ridge

AWA believes it is time to place a moratorium on all extraction that destroys the sensitive habitats at Caw Ridge, northwest of Grande Cache. This position is supported by documents AWA received in an August 2008 Freedom of Information Act request (a request finally fulfilled in mid-July 2009). The more than 300 pages of government correspondence, meeting notes and communications AWA received highlight how sensitive this area is, how deeply SRD's Fish and Wildlife officers care, and how little influence these men and women have in decisions made for this area. Too many decisions are being made with little or no regard for the significant alpine wildlife resource that Caw Ridge sustains. Fish and Wildlife officers are exceptionally concerned; they view Caw Ridge as one of Alberta's most important habitats for large mammals.

- Christyann Olson

READER'S CORNER

Alberta Views: Canada's Magazine of the Year .

Reviewed by Dave Whitson

In June of this year, *Alberta Views* was named Canada's Magazine of the Year for 2008, beating out widely known national publications like *Macleans* and *The Walrus*. For good measure, an essay by Calgary author and journalist Chris Turner, on Alberta's pending decision on an application to build a nuclear power complex near Peace River, was named 'Essay of the Year.' Together, these accolades demonstrate that *Alberta Views* is attracting increasing attention for its coverage of the issues and challenges facing our province. The Turner award, in addition, draws attention to something this reader has learned to look forward to in *Alberta Views*, namely coverage of environment and land use issues that is consistently timely, well researched, and fearless.

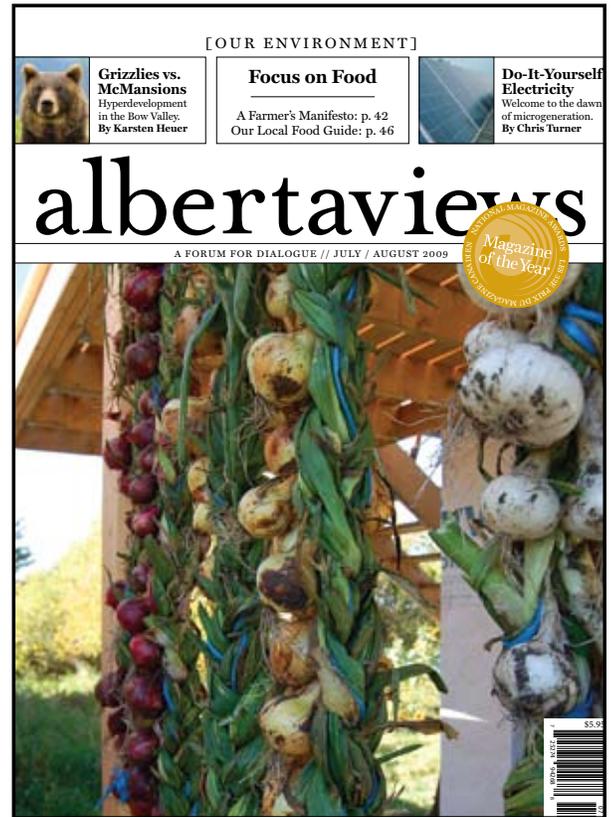
My own attention to *Alberta Views'* coverage of our province's environment began in 2003, with an issue (May/June) that included articles on the threats to our rivers and our water tables posed by factory farms (by Jacqueline Price), by the oil industry (by Mike Leschart), and by climate change induced by population growth and associated human activities (by David Schindler, the renowned University of Alberta biologist). I have used these well written and well argued articles for several years now in a course on the politics in the Canadian West, and together they help students to begin to think about water as a political issue, and about the policy challenges involved in managing our water supplies and protecting water quality.

The same issues, water supply and water quality, are the focus of two powerful articles in November 2007, by award winning journalists Andrew Nikiforuk and Jeremy Klaszus. Nikiforuk's illustrated piece describes the environmental damages caused by the tailings ponds built to abate the toxic by-products of the oil sands industry. He documents the sheer size of these toxic lakes (displacing almost 50

square kilometres of forest and muskeg), as well as their impacts on plant life and migratory birds, and the leakage of carcinogens into nearby rivers and groundwater. The essay by Klaszus reports in greater detail on the deadly effects: reduced water flow in the Athabasca Delta, deformed aquatic life, including fish with tumours, and a high incidence of rare cancers in the community of Fort Chipewyan. Klaszus also takes aim at the pro-industry responses of the government departments whose job it is to monitor environmental damage and safeguard the public; Alberta Environment chooses to ignore the province's foremost water scientist, while Health Canada seeks to silence the doctor who raised the alarm about cancer in Fort Chip.

This agenda of making environmental debates accessible to a public audience is again illustrated in Turner's award-winning essay on nuclear power (October 2008), as well as an essay on the landfill challenges facing Alberta's cities by Evan Osenton (April 2009), and another more even recent essay by Turner (July/August 2009) on the future of microgeneration (the generation of power in the home). Together, these pieces on Alberta's environmental policy challenges exemplify what good journalism should be trying to do. They advocate for particular solutions and they are written with passion, but they are based in credible research and are clearly argued. They thus they have the potential to inform debate, and encourage public understanding of issues that too many people have been prepared to leave to officialdom.

Another topic where I have found *Alberta Views'* coverage to be both timely and welcome concerns what I will call "the politics of place." By this



I mean the debates over growth in our communities that follow from new trends in working and living. Sometimes these arise in rural communities like Brooks, where the building of an industrial-scale meat-packing plant in 1996 has produced jobs, as promised. However, it has also led to recruitment of workers from across Canada and abroad, to conflicts between townspeople and immigrants, and to stresses on Brooks's schools and social services (Michael Broadway, May 2006). Development can have its downsides in big cities, too, and another article by Klaszus in the same issue (May 2006) reports on efforts to create affordable housing in Calgary's inner-city Inglewood. Klaszus invites readers to think about the impacts of booming housing markets on low income citizens, and to consider the policy challenges posed by urban gentrification.

In Alberta, of course, gentrification is not confined to Calgary and Edmonton. Indeed it has brought growth and prosperity along the southern foothills, nowhere more so than Canmore, and a recent issue of *Alberta Views* (July/

August 2009) includes a thoughtful discussion by author and wilderness advocate Karsten Heuer of the conflicts between humans and wildlife created by Canmore's dramatic growth over the last twenty years. Heuer uses the tragic killing of a Canmore mother by a grizzly bear to ask whether the town's growth out of the Bow Valley and up the sides of the adjacent mountains hasn't brought residential development – and residents – into habitat that wildlife (wolves and cougars, as well as bears) have long frequented. He also questions the demand for trophy second homes that has driven Canmore's expansion - "too many people trying to build too many big homes in too small a space" - and outlines measures that some Colorado mountain communities have taken to prevent

themselves turning into 'another Aspen'.

Alberta Views, in summary, has made itself into an invaluable forum for debate about how we live in Alberta, and how the ways in which we live are affecting our environment and those who share it (wildlife and humans alike). It is not a 'political' magazine in the sense of providing coverage of events at the Legislature, though an essay by Fred Stenson (May 2008) examines the ascension of Ed Stelmach to the Premier's Office. In a deeper sense, however, a sense in which politics means debates about how our world is changing and how we can respond to these changes most effectively, *Alberta Views* is a profoundly political publication. It is not partisan, in the sense of supporting a particular party or ideology. However, I

would argue that it has provided a more effective opposition - or perhaps more accurately, a forum for oppositional voices - in Alberta than any of the Opposition parties in recent years. This is because it has consistently raised issues of great political import, and challenged Albertans to consider the kind of province we want to be. In addition, it has honoured political activism (an issue in 2004 was devoted to activism), by celebrating the public efforts of our neighbours and colleagues, people from all parts of Alberta and from all walks of life, who have been sufficiently concerned about what's happening in our province that they have tried to do something.

- Dave Whitson teaches in the
Department of Political Science at the
University of Alberta

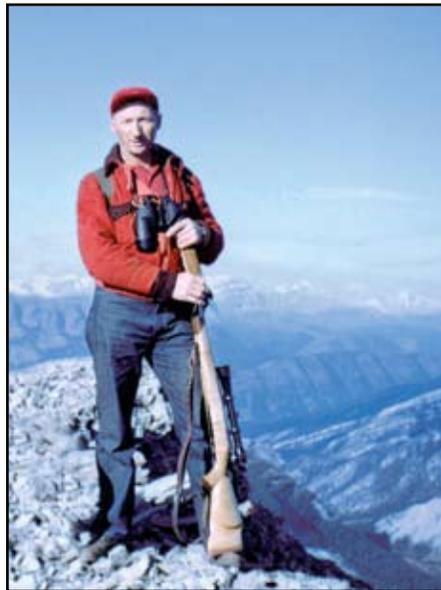
RECALL OF THE WILD - MAN OF THE LAND AND THE SKY

Steve Dixon - Man of the Land and the Sky

By Vivian Pharis and Norma Ruecker

Steve Dixon is a man of sharp mind and practical hand who has always acted on need. A challenging job presents itself and Steve is the man who will find a way to resolution through determination, ingenuity or maybe invention - he holds a dozen or so patents. In the early 1960s Steve was faced with a new and overwhelming need. His beloved prairie and alpine landscapes and wildlife habitats were suddenly being needlessly and senselessly destroyed by a rash of industrial road building and a new influx of recreational vehicles and yahoo hunters.

Steve saw the need for an organization dedicated to protecting the most critical land base for wildlife, which he knew to be wilderness. Steve spoke out at local gatherings about this need and fortunately caught the ear of two like-minded and equally concerned individuals – Floyd Stromstedt, a Calgary oilman and Willie Michalsky, a Lundbreck rancher and outfitter. Although the three did not know each other well, they shared a common vision to see wilderness lands protected and in 1965 formed Alberta Wilderness Association.



Steve Dixon

For more than 90 years Steve has been a thinker, doer and a hands-on advocate for the things he has cherished most through his long, full life. These things are farming, hunting, land conservation, community development, and above all else, flying small planes. Steve explains this to us while his well-worn hands emphasize points on the table top where his wife Helen, has just served us lunch. He explains that his appreciation of the land has gone through a progression since he was a child. For the first 30 or so years he appreciated it

close-up, on foot. He hunted bighorns, elk and deer in the south eastern slopes on foot, each trip bringing more joy than the last for the pure beauty and bounty of nature. Then foot travel evolved into horse travel as he hunted and explored further afield. Finally, his appreciation bounded skyward, and he and his constant co-pilot Helen, began a new appreciation of landscape from the air. It was from the air too, that he could witness best the rapid changes happening to his favourite landscapes.

Steve was born in Kamsack Saskatchewan almost 92 years ago. Within a few years, the family headed west to Calgary where Steve attended McDougall School and lived in his family's house on 6th Avenue. His father worked as a mechanic and foreman for Rumley Tractor. Steve's mechanical ingenuity was nurtured from a young age as he fondly recalls travelling by train with his father to service those old Oil Pull Rumleys. Around age 10, the family moved to the prairie farming community of Brant where Steve's father had purchased a garage. Eventually, Steve married his school sweetheart, Helen, when he was 22 and she 19. They still live on her family's wheat-producing farm and will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary later this year. While they have recently leased out their

land to other grain producers, the two continue to live in the house they built, surrounded by the substantial shelterbelt they planted and nurtured. Their home is a prairie oasis where they still raise a splendid vegetable garden and continue a life of near self sufficiency.

Early in childhood, a keen interest in guns and how they are made led Steve into a life-long fascination with them, with gun smithing, competition shooting, and hunting. As with so many early conservationists, hunting was the impetus for Steve to explore the lands around him and to learn to appreciate nature. His primary hunting grounds were the upper Sheep River and Burns Mine and the area around Highwood Pass (lands now within Kananaskis Country) as well as lands west of these, into the Elk River of B.C. In the 1940s, the locals referred to the area which is now South Kananaskis along the Sheep and Elbow Rivers, as the *Big Horn*. After the fires of 1936, the Big Horn became a big game mecca. Steve describes standing on Rickert's Pass above the old Burns Mine and seeing a grizzly at close range, bighorn rams further along the ridge and a herd of about 200 elk just beneath him in the meadow. People who have known such spectacles never forget them, and their hopes and standards for an area's wildlife potential are forever measured by them.

Serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force as an Air Force mechanic ignited Steve's greatest passion, which is flying bush planes. Although he never learned to fly in the RCAF, he took it up at the end of the war and received his pilot's license in 1946. His training and flight log shows, remarkably, that he became a pilot

with only 9 hours of flying time, quite possibly the fewest hours ever logged to become licensed in Canada, if not beyond Canada. Steve is rightfully proud of this achievement and his original log book was filled to capacity by 1983 with 1185 flying hours recorded, at which point he stopped keeping track. Right up until he quit flying two years ago at age 90, the eastern slopes mountains that were so familiar to him from the ground, remained a favourite flight path for Steve and Helen. They never tire of the alpine beauty from the ground or as it unfolds beneath them.

Over the years, they observed a lot of changes on those familiar slopes. The building of roads, loss of forests to logging and fires and human presence all increased over time. The most notable impact for Steve was the disappearance of the large elk herds of the 1940s and 1950s. Both Steve and Helen recall the spectacle of flying over wintering elk herds on Flat Top (Plateau Mountain). By 1967 the herds were gone and Flat Top was a maze of snowmobile tracks. Fortunately, Plateau Mountain was later closed to recreational vehicle use and made an ecological reserve.

Steve did not wait for the disappearance of all elk to take action to protect wildlife. Always forward thinking, he knew the eastern slopes populations were heading for disaster and he realized he must get involved. In 1944 he was on Cat Creek near Highwood Pass when he met with a couple of local Alberta Fish and Game Association members, Bud Davies and Andy Wallace, and realized they shared concerns for wildlife. This encounter prompted Steve

to join the High River Fish and Game Association and by the early '50s he was president. He worked hard to settle some of the many issues between hunters and ranchers regarding trespass, litter and vehicle access. But, he struggled to have his new association take on the advocacy work he saw was needed, for the conservation and protection of wildlife habitats.

Steve saw beyond local concerns and identified the need for province-wide land conservation. It was at an annual meeting of the Alberta Fish and Game Association that Steve met Willie Michalsky and discovered more common interest. As early as 1955, Steve and Willie were seriously discussing the need for organizing a conservation advocacy group. Steve was instrumental in early kitchen table meetings of like-minded individuals including Willie Michalsky and Floyd Stromstedt. Together they realized the need not only to curtail encroaching roads, motorized intrusion and unethical hunting; they identified the need for an overhaul of the hunting regulations, for a system of land protection and to protect a precious commodity of the recent past - wilderness solitude. The Alberta Wilderness Association was born.

Always a man reacting to need, once Steve saw that his beloved wild country had an energetic and organized group prepared to act in its defence, he felt the need to move on and apply his energies and skills to yet another area of need. This time it was in defence of disappearing public schools from rural communities. Steve and Helen remain active pursuing this need to this day. 🐾

BACKCOUNTRY RECIPES

Whitewater Granola Bars

1 cup butter
1 ½ cups peanut butter
1 ½ tbsp vanilla
2 cups brown sugar
1 cup corn syrup
6 cups oats
1 cup coconut, toasted
1 cup sunflower seeds, toasted
1 cup sesame seeds, toasted
2 cups chocolate chips (or 1 cup raisins and 1 cup chocolate chips)

In a skillet, toast coconut, sunflower seeds and sesame seeds and set aside to cool. In a large mixing bowl, cream together butter, peanut butter, vanilla and brown sugar. Add corn syrup and then mix in remaining ingredients. Press into greased 12 by 18 inch cookie sheet. Bake in a 350 degree oven for approximately 20 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool slightly and cut while still warm.

Makes 16 big bars.

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EVENTS



Jura Creek hike, Summer 2009. PHOTO: M.MCKEE

AWA SUMMER HIKES

AWA's hikes program is a great way to explore the lesser-known wilderness gems of Alberta, discover our province's diverse wildlife, and learn about AWA's work to protect these magnificent landscapes.

For more information about all our summer hikes see the 2009 hikes brochure or visit our website: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca.

Pre-registration is required for all trips

Online: www.AlbertaWilderness.ca
Phone: (403) 283-2025
Toll-free: 1-866-313-0713

BACKPACK TRIP

\$100 – AWA members
\$125 – non-members

Saturday September 26 – Monday
September 28, 2009 (2 nights)

Lakeland Backpack

With Aaron Davies



Alberta Wilderness Association Annual General Meeting

Saturday, November 21, 2009

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Location: 455 – 12 St NW, Calgary

Registration: 1-866-313-0713 or
(403) 283-2025

DAY HIKES

\$20 – AWA members
\$25 – non-members

Wednesday September 2 (re-scheduled)

Plateau Mountain Hike

With Vivian Pharis

The broad wind-swept summit supports a remarkable variety of plants and geological gems, with stunning vistas across the mountains and foothills. (This hike replaces the postponed hike from August 5).

Difficulty: Five hiker icons, with the first two being red and the last three being grey.

ADVANCE NOTICE:

Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture

Friday November 20, 2009

Each year AWA challenge ourselves with new ideas in this lecture.

Our guest lecturer this year is Richard Secord.

Location 455 12 St NW, Calgary
Wine & Cheese Reception 6:00 p.m.

Lecture: 7:00 p.m.

Cost: \$25.00

Reservations: Online

<http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca>

Saturday September 26

Zephyr Creek Hike

With Paul Sutherland

This beautiful valley, draining into the Highwood River offers something beyond dancing creeks, peaceful woodlands and stunning mountain views. Pictographs, some over 300 years old, can still be seen today.

Difficulty: Four hiker icons, with the first two being red and the last two being grey.



Owl expert Ray Cromie entertained participants in AWA's Solstice Stroll at the Devonian Botanic Gardens on June 19. Nearly forty people braved menacing thunderstorms to hear Ray offer fascinating insights into the private lives of some of Alberta's eleven owl species, such as the great gray owl (with Ray, above). PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS

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