

2014-2015 Annual Report

Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action for 50 years



Alberta Wilderness Association

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2014 - 2015



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COVER PHOTO – CROWSNEST RIVER – IAN URQUHART

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WILDERNESS FOR TOMORROW



What an amazing year for conservation since I wrote you last fall. We've kept you up to date with *Wild Lands Advocate* articles, website postings, newsletters and media stories. There are some truly significant milestones to write about as we reflect on the past year.

Can you imagine the excitement as we received the spring counts and realized the Emergency Protection Order for Greater Sage-grouse along with everyone's efforts on the ground was helping make a difference? To know the numbers of Sage-grouse increased raised hope and we have carried on working to see these majestic birds recover and thrive in Alberta. Success for Sage-grouse means success for so many other grassland species as well. Our vision is for healthy, vibrant and protected prairies and grasslands with room for wildlife to roam freely and for the forces of nature to be wild.

Late last fall, we learned that the terms for the Hay-Zama Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would be met early. The companies extracting resources from within the boundaries of Hay-Zama Wildland Park are in the clean-up stages; two years early! The process that led to the MOU and the twinning is historic, and a significant model of cooperation and more importantly collaboration. It is a model that could be applied to similar scenarios in Alberta and throughout the world.

This fall, the Government of Alberta announced that the 50 year quest AWA and so many others shared for a truly protected Castle Wilderness is one step closer. Industrial scale logging is no longer allowed, and no new tenures for forestry or oil and gas will be given in the expanded Castle Wildland and Castle Provincial Parks. You may remember that in September 2013 in an effort to demonstrate ongoing concern about the Castle, fifty people hiked to **the** top of Table Mountain to display large banners stating "**Protect the Castle**". Aerial shots captured **the** enthusiasm of participants as they hoped to bring attention to the plight of the Castle one more time. At last, there is progress.

Yes, it is 50 years since the founders of AWA, folks like Bill Michalsky, Steve Dixon, Floyd Stromstedt, Andy Russell, Dick Pharis and others sat around a kitchen table in Pincher Creek worrying about changes on the landscape and how it was affecting wildlife. They moved forward, planning and with vision launched the Alberta Wilderness Association. How could they know what a force this association would become and how much it would be needed today? Their vision for the Castle is closer now than it has ever been and with AWA's tenacity and hard work and **with the support of people like you**, we will ensure the management plans and enforcement match the vision.

50 years as an association is a significant landmark and as the years go by we will remember this year for the milestones in conservation included in this report and for our strength and the support we have from folks like you. Financial support that meant we could be tenacious and work throughout Alberta on many issues. It also meant that we could purchase our home, the Hillhurst Cottage School. We are no longer at the mercy of a landlord, and it has made all the difference to our extensive library, our outreach programs, our ability to share meeting space and help our colleagues, our ability to recognize Wilderness Defenders with a permanent wall for their plaques and stories and so much more.

It has been a good year and I am privileged to work for and with you, our members and supporters.

Our Annual Report is an ongoing historical record of our work each year. The detailed report that follows recounts progress and lack thereof in each of our priority areas. It gives us a sense of where we have come from and where we still have to get to. We are inspired by your support.

Christyann Olson,
Executive Director
16 November, 2015

WHO WE ARE

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.” - Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*



This year marked the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Alberta Wilderness Association. It is remarkable how much the AWA, through its dedicated staff, members and volunteers have contributed to the welfare of Alberta's wild spaces over the past 50 years. Here are just a few of those contributions.

In the 1970's the AWA pushed for the protection of nine wildland areas in headwaters regions along the Eastern Slopes. Most of this effort was through that most democratic of processes, the Eastern Slopes Hearings of 1973. The resulting policy secured much of this critical region as Prime Protection and Critical Wildlife Habitat zones that were to be free of industrialized activity and motorized recreation. There was an accompanying legislative promise to protect a large wilderness area in the headwaters of each major river. Although this promise was not acted upon, three small wilderness areas were created, the Ghost, Siffleur and Whitegoat, and Willmore Wilderness Park was made more secure through AWA's efforts.

In the mid 1990's, the Eastern Slopes Integrated Resource Plans that the AWA had assumed a leading role in developing were used to help successfully fight a sour gas well proposed for the Whaleback. This was one of the very first sour gas wells to ever be turned down by Alberta's regulator, for environmental reasons. Also in the 1980's AWA was instrumental in bringing the 4000 km² Bighorn Wildland to the brink of park dedication. In the 1980's, AWA broke ranks with behind-the-door-secrecy and exposed that Alberta's environmentally strong Coal Policy was about to be rewritten. AWA's actions prevented the opening of new Eastern Slopes areas to coal exploration and development.

Since the 1970's the AWA has advocated for the Aspen Parkland which is an endangered natural region. The AWA won protection for the David Lake and the globally important Rumsey areas.

In the 1980's, the AWA was instrumental in securing protection of the Milk River Canyon (a grasslands area we co-manage to this day). The same successful effort went into securing designation of the Suffield National Wildlife Area, a natural grasslands area that we also vigorously defended from a shallow gas infill development project in 2005, which involved drilling up to 1275 shallow gas wells.

The AWA has put in 5 decades of work on protecting public lands. With the help of the Alberta Fish and Game Association, we stopped major public land lease sales in the early 1980's, public lands we would not have today without such a hard fought fight and such a clear victory. More recently the AWA got the Premier to put a stop to Potatogate, which was another attempt to sell off valuable public grasslands and a home to several species at risk. The AWA also participated effectively in the grazing lease disposition review that helped improve management and public access to public lands.

The AWA helped secure protection of an internationally significant Ramsar¹ wetland at Hay-Zama as a wildland park in 1999. The AWA worked with the government of Inner Mongolia to twin Hay-Zama with another Ramsar site at Dalai Lake in Inner Mongolia. The AWA secured time limits for resource extraction at Hay-Zama and all oil and gas production has now ceased.

In this decade, with the help of Ecojustice, the AWA had success in Federal Court securing legally designated Critical Habitat and an Emergency Protection Order for the Sage-grouse. Through the Sage-grouse Partnership, the AWA is working to secure the future for this endangered species. There has been some good progress with more than a doubling of the Sage-grouse population in Alberta in the last year. The AWA has also had success in the courts in moving towards the protection of the Woodland Caribou. This has been a long slow process for on the ground change but, as with the Sage-grouse, the AWA has been effective in putting pressure on the government to designate critical habitat for this threatened species.

Also in this decade, the AWA was a key player in getting the spring Grizzly Bear hunt cancelled after years of public pressure and some leading edge and innovative public education campaigns.

This year the AWA is also celebrating the Alberta government's decision to legally protect the Castle Wilderness as a Wildland and Provincial Park. For decades, AWA and many others strongly supported Castle Wilderness protection. The AWA advocated for protection of the Castle Wilderness as a fledgling organization in the 1960s and now finally sees the designation of a Provincial Park and a Wildland Park on AWA's 50th anniversary this year.

The AWA will continue to engage in unwavering and relentless action that contributes to the welfare of Alberta's wild spaces. I believe that with the continuing effort and advocacy of the AWA's staff, members and volunteers, the next 50 years will bring even greater benefits and protection for Alberta's wild spaces, flora and fauna.

Richard Secord
President
16 November 2015

¹ The Ramsar Convention (formally, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat) is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands, recognizing the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands and their economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed in 1971.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President:	Richard Secord, Edmonton
First Vice-President:	Owen McGoldrick, Calgary
Second Vice-President:	Jim Campbell, Calgary
Secretary/Treasurer:	Cliff Wallis, Calgary
Directors:	Vivian Pharis, Cochrane Clint Docken, Bragg Creek Chris Saunders, Calgary Frank Calder, Edmonton Kirsten Pugh, Calgary Gail Docken, Edmonton
Director Emeritus:	Herbert G. Kariel, Calgary

AWA's board of directors is composed of dedicated volunteers with specific attributes and skill sets that support the needs of the organization and the staff. We are fortunate to have a full complement of board members based on this approach to creating a governance board. Elections for the board are held annually at the Annual General Meeting.

STAFF

Executive Director:	Christyann Olson, BN, MSc
Conservation Specialists:	Carolyn Campbell, BA, BEd, MA, MBA Sean Nichols, BSc Brittany Verbeek, BSc David Robinson, MSc (October – February) Nora Spencer, MSc (June – Sept)
Wild Lands Advocate Editor:	Ian Urquhart, PhD
Administrative Associates:	Diane Mihalcheon Cindy Ralston
Library Support:	Julie Desautels, BSc, MIS (July – February)

A hallmark of AWA's strength is its ability to adapt, reorganize, and be relevant in times of change. AWA has an excellent staff, complemented by individuals on its board of directors who volunteer and provide tremendous support to the research, advocacy, and outreach work that is required throughout the province. Core staffing was supported by casual and contract staff throughout the year to assist with specific projects.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES, OBJECTIVES

Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action

For more than 45 years, AWA has spoken in defence of those who have no voice: wild lands, wildlife, and wild waters throughout Alberta. From grassroots beginnings in the kitchens of backcountry enthusiasts, ranchers, and outfitters, we have grown into an independent province-wide conservation organization, well-recognized for our tenacity, integrity, and longevity. When necessary, we are uncompromisingly outspoken and willing to engage politically on provincial conservation issues. Our work spans the entire province, and we represent a wide diversity of more than 7,000 members and supporters throughout 198 Alberta communities and around the world who care about protecting the province's wild places. During this year membership growth has stabilized and new targets will be set in the coming fiscal year.

AWA is a non-profit, federally registered, charitable society with a provincial office in Calgary, which houses our Wilderness Resource Centre, the province's most comprehensive archive and growing collection on conservation in Alberta.

VISION

Protected Wilderness

There will be a comprehensive system of protected wild areas.

Decision-making Society

There will be a society with decision-making processes, policies, and laws that recognize the value of nature for its own sake.

Effective and Credible Advocates

AWA will be an effective and credible advocate that fosters awareness and helps Albertans protect wild areas and wildlife.

Independent

AWA will have sufficient resources to speak independently on wilderness issues.

VALUES

Ecocentredness

We recognize the inherent importance of nature and humankind's place in it, and the role of AWA is to be an advocate for that which cannot speak for itself.

Integrity

We conduct our advocacy with truth, honesty, and respect for others, and within the full limits of the law.

Respectfulness

We develop rapport with individuals and communities through active listening, openness, and free access to information in a democratic way.

Participation

We promote effective environmental decision making through an empowered and knowledgeable public that is inclusive of all segments of society.

Tenacity

We will steadfastly advocate for nature in a manner true to our principles through innovation, persistence, and passion.

Passion

We are free to feel, demonstrate, and encourage an emotional and spiritual connectedness with nature.

OBJECTIVES

To promote the protection of wildland areas, wildlife, and wild rivers in Alberta and to preserve them in their natural state.

To safeguard and restore the wild, natural ecosystems of Alberta.

To enable Albertans to communicate effectively with government, industry, and other sectors of society on matters concerning the wild, natural ecosystems of Alberta.

To educate Albertans on the value, ecologically sustainable use, and conservation of wilderness and of natural lands, water, and wildlife.

To foster among Albertans a sense of connectedness to and passion for wild places, wildlife, and Alberta's natural landscapes.



Handhills Tour - Tjarda Barratt

TURNING 50 NEVER FELT SO GOOD!

"June 25, 2015...the day marked Alberta Wilderness Association's 50th birthday and we celebrated this milestone with an open house at our heritage building headquarters – Hillhurst Cottage School. Veteran and new members of our conservation community joined special guests Mayor Naheed Nenshi and Councillor Druh Farrell in toasting AWA's successes and imagining a brighter future for wild Alberta. That future will be imagined and implemented from our longstanding home in Kensington, a home we have purchased gratefully from the City of Calgary with the help of many donors'. Volunteers have long played a major role in making AWA a conservation leader in Alberta. This report is a testament to their importance. Thanks to all who have made the first 50 years of the Alberta Wilderness Association so memorable. - Ian Urquhart"

The celebration and the speeches were so important that some have been included as part of this long term historical record of our 50th year.

Transcript of Mayor Naheed Nenshi's speech

Thanks very much Richard, and let me start by saying "Okii," that is, of course, hello in Blackfoot. And I think that it's important today as we're going to be talking about history, and as we're going to be talking about the future that we acknowledge we are standing today on ancient lands. For thousands of years people have been coming to the banks of this great river, to live and to love and to trade and to build community. And so let's start today by acknowledging that we are in this place called *motiskis*, the Elbow, the traditional lands of the Blackfoot people, shared of course by the other peoples of Treaty Seven: the Beaver people of the Siksika Nation and the Nakoda people of the Stoney Nations. It is on their history and on their legacy that we continue to build history today. And certainly we are standing in a place with a lot of history. I am absolutely thrilled to be here to honour the Alberta Wilderness Association, on their fiftieth anniversary. The Alberta Wilderness Association are of course one of the most important advocates for a wild Alberta, that's what it says here a wild Alberta... Councillor Farrell we don't mean stampede tents, crowds next to your house, down the street, many many times. I'm excited to celebrate this fiftieth anniversary milestone with you. You know, the Alberta Wilderness Association isn't just about wilderness, it's about citizenship, it's about stewardship, it's about looking after the community, and I think that that is an extraordinary thing. And what a great way to celebrate, the fiftieth birthday of this organization, by purchasing this home, this beautiful space, this Hillhurst Cottage School. I understand that the fundraising is almost done. Richard told me he's got twelve hundred bucks left to raise. So what I'm basically telling all of you in this room...is that balance is hitting zero before anybody leaves. Hit up the bear for money as you're wandering through. I'm quite serious; open your wallets and let's finish it today as we celebrate our fiftieth birthday.

This building was built in 1910. It was built on land purchased from Ezra Riley...the namesake of Riley Park just to the north of us. And in 1910, Calgary was in its infancy. One hundred years before I became mayor... just saying. But the people of 1910 were living at the end or actually the middle of Calgary's first great boom. Between 1902 and 1912, Calgary increased its population tenfold. Imagine that. But the people of that time were not building for the community they had; they were building for the community that was yet to be. In 1910 the ground was broken on a magnificent new city hall, much too big for the city at the time; magnificent—a magnificent sandstone building; a woman called Annie was going door to door, attempting to raise funds for a new public library. The public library, by the way,

which we now know as Memorial Park Library, celebrated its hundredth anniversary four years ago now. It was funded by Andrew Carnegie – Annie, her letters went far and she was able to get his ear. Government buildings and recreation facilities, Calgary’s first playground was built at that time. And we were entirely building for the future. And the Hillhurst Cottage School was part of that growth. It was part of the dream of those people for the future. And I feel like we’re in a similar space right now. I feel like we’re in a similar place right now where we’re also thinking about our future and dreaming about our future and thinking about the community that we could be. And my greatest hope is that, in 2115, the mayor of Calgary will be standing at this podium, celebrating the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Alberta Wilderness Association, and she will say “the people of 2015 were thinking about the future, and they left us this wonderful space, and we have to build on their legacy.” And I think that’s tremendously important. But let’s not forget that for quite a long period of time, for nearly thirty-five years if I’m doing the math on my own age and the age of the Alberta Wilderness Association correctly, this wonderful building has been the home of the Alberta Wilderness Association. And that means that this historic space is not just a part of Calgary’s built history, and Calgary’s education history, but it’s also a really important part of our environmental history.

We’ve had champions for Alberta and champions for wilderness based here for decades, and as a result Alberta and Calgary are so much the better, so much the better. We’re protecting wildlands, more wildlife, more water resources, precisely because of this advocacy. And that is why councillor—my council colleagues and I including your single most powerful advocate, your area councillor, Councillor Farrell — don’t let her size fool you... she is mighty—we’re very, very, very proud and very happy to support the Alberta Wilderness Association in the purchase of this special place. And it is our absolute honour to be here today to celebrate these milestones with you. May this school, may this building, may this history have many, many, many more years of active life in this community, as your home. Congratulations, and here’s to the next fifty years!



Mayor Naheed Nenshi and AWA Executive Director Christyann Olson - Jose. Quiroz

Transcript of Councillor Druh Farrell's speech

I always hate following Naheed, because he's a great speaker, and rousing, and I am so grateful that we are finally starting to recognize our heritage, and First Nations heritage, and where we have a lot to be grateful for. I am very grateful that we have Alberta Wilderness Association, and I'm also very grateful that you have been a loving steward of a beautiful building, for more... almost two generations. So thank you so much for taking care of this building, you deserve it. It's your home now, and it's permanent. And so for the next fifty years, you will be taking care of this building, and then into the future. We need groups like the Alberta Wilderness Association, more than ever. Just about every action that we take as human beings does some sort of damage to the world around us. And when you think of billions more being added to our population, that's a losing proposition, unless we change the way we live our lives. And so Alberta Wilderness Association reminds us that those wild places, that we're losing at an ever-increasing rate, are exceedingly important. And it makes me believe in a bright future, when I see a room full of people who are able to raise money for a beautiful building. Thank you for the work that you do. Christyann was in our offices...well, it was dogged, dogged, and so you have a lot to be grateful for with your executive director and all the team. So to the board and the executive director and everyone here, thank you for the work that you do.



Councillor Druh Farrell - Kevin Mihalcheon

Transcript of Dick Pharis' speech

I notice that there are a number of original founding members of the AWA in the audience this afternoon. All of us who started the AWA, back in the late sixties, practiced what we preached, in the sense that we used the wilderness, and hopefully we used it with soft footprints. I was a member, then the director, then the vice president, and then the president. I was president for three years during the early Lougheed years and we went through the east slope hearings, we went through month after

month, year after year of interactions with the petroleum industry, who were punching roads up into the front ranges for gas. We ended up after the east slope hearings with a management policy for the eastern slopes of Alberta; that management policy was never an accident of regulations, but it was upheld by the Lougheed government pretty well during the era. This was a pretty exciting time; I'd like to remind you that the US *Wilderness Act* is fifty years old today as well, and that the Montana Wilderness Association is fifty- one years old, so we were in good hands in terms of our neighbours, and here in a timely fashion. We had lots of help, then, from other organizations CPAWS, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society; Alberta's Fish and Game Association, under the supervision or under the presidency of Tom O'Keefe and Bob Scammell, who were on our side. We had friends in industry, and many of our original members were in the oil and gas industry, and they all liked to hunt, hike, and fish in the back country of Alberta, and they were all upset and perturbed with what was happening. We had friends within government as well, and one reason that we have Willmore Wilderness Park, just north of Jasper, as pristine as it is now, is because of Fred McDougall who was the deputy minister of lands and forests in that key area. Fred helped keep the Willmore sacrosanct, and it's still a place where you can go lose yourself for weeks on end. I turned the reins over to Ray Sloan in 1975, and Vivian, my wife, came on as president somewhat later; but we always lived the wilderness life in the summers and the fall and the springs, and it's been something that we value, value very much. So I'd like to leave you with hope for the future, and that hope for the future says that we will finally enact some of these wildland recreation areas that look good on the maps, look good in paper, but still need to be regulated further than just policy. Thank you.



Dick Pharis - Jose Quiroz

Cliff Wallis's speech: A GREAT 50 YEARS!

Thanks everyone for coming today to celebrate. It's not just about this building -- it really is about what goes on inside. AWA has impressive achievements from its early days all the way to now. These are kind of my top 10 hits for the decades. Let's see if you can think of others!

HIT #1 Eastern Slopes -- Back in the 1970s, when the province had a more open door policy, we pushed for and secured protection of several east slopes Rocky Mountain wildlands – the Ghost, Siffleur, White Goat, Willmore. Out of that, our staff and volunteers displayed untiring advocacy in numerous Integrated Resource Plans along those Eastern Slopes. Further along that protection grew to secure the Whaleback, and the integrated plans helped AWA successfully fight proposed gas wells. These turned out to be the first wells in Alberta to ever be turned down for environmental reasons). We also worked hard to get Alberta's first Eastern Slopes Policy which had more general protections.

HIT # 2Grasslands --We were instrumental in securing protection of the Milk River Canyon in the 1980s(an area we co-managed to this day). The same successful effort went into securing designation of the Suffield National Wildlife Area, an area that we also vigorously defended from 1270 proposed shallow gas wells)

HIT# 3 Aspen Parkland -- we have worked on this endangered natural region since the 1970s and won protection for the David Lake and globally important Rumsey areas

HIT# 4 Boreal Forest -- we helped secure protection of an internationally significant Ramsar wetland at Hay-Zama as a wildland park. We worked with the government of Inner Mongolia to twin Hay-Zama with another Ramsar site at Dalai Lake in Inner Mongolia. On our end, we secured time limits for resource development and all oil and gas production has now ceased—we are into clean-up of the sites and looking to how to manage this site going forward.

HIT# 5 Public lands—we have put in decades of work on protecting public lands. With Alberta Fish and Game we stopped major public land lease sales in the early 1980s –public lands we would not have today without such a hard fight and such a clear victory. More recently we got the Premier to put a stop to Potatogate--another attempt to sell off valuable public grasslands and home to several species at risk. AWA participated heavily in the grazing lease disposition review that helped improve management and public access.

HIT # 6 Sage-grouse—with Ecojustice's great help, we had success in the courts securing legally designated Critical Habitat and an Emergency Protection Order. With the Sage-grouse Partnership we are working on the future for this critically imperilled species -- at least there is now some hope with more than doubling of population in last year!

HIT # 7 Caribou—success in courts in moving towards protection; a long slow process for on the ground change but, as with sage-grouse, we are moving the needle and keeping government's feet to the fire

HIT# 8 Grizzly Bear—AWA was a key player in getting the spring hunt cancelled after years of pressure and some cool public education campaigns

HIT# 9 Coal Policy—AWA broke ranks with the behind the closed door secrecy and exposed that the Coal Policy was about to be rewritten -- our actions prevented opening up new areas to exploration and development

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST HIT # 10 The Advocate—the BEST conservation magazine in western Canada and that's just my top ten. We do lots more.

AWA is THE main Alberta repository of expertise that has proved so helpful in so many processes and negotiations (water, fish, wildlife, public lands, protected areas, forestry, OHVs)

Above all, AWA has an impressive toolkit and we use the right tool for the job –AWA has been at the forefront with its effective use of litigation (Sage Grouse, Caribou) but also collaborative processes like Hay-Zama, Milk River Management Committee and Sage-grouse Partnership. Ranchers who were suspicious of our motives in the 1980s and 1990s now call us up for help. We have shown leadership in ERCB, NRCB, NEB, FEARO/CCEA hearings and a plethora of government processes on land, water and biodiversity.

But our work is never done. There is still lots on our plate. We hope to have good news soon on a number of fronts. We are almost there on another 4 issues:

- 1 Protection of Castle Wilderness—election platform of NDs
2. Protection of Milk River Ridge grasslands—in SSRP
3. Rumsey Management Plan—in progress
4. Game Farming—this long unbalanced fight did at least keep them from becoming shooting parks.

Through constant public pressure and the disease AWA well demonstrated would occur, the farms are almost all gone now but there is a legacy of Chronic Wasting Disease that will persist long into the future. Hopefully, at our 100th anniversary, someone will look back and add these to our top 10 list of things that got accomplished with our help. I would like to personally thank you for your unwavering support in these efforts and I invite you to look around, chat and have a bite or two when the speeches are over.



Cliff Wallis - Jose Quiroz

Transcript of Tom Beck's speech

I think one of the previous speakers mentioned that this is an emotional day, and I've been sitting looking at all these old friends, and missing them because some of them are no longer with us as the old members know. But at inception, the people I met — and there was nothing formal about AWA at that time, they were by and large, well they were from every walk of life. They were from urban places, rural places, and they all had one thing in common. I think they had a vision of wilderness in Alberta. And it didn't come out, but it was there, in every one of them. And it was fascinating to watch. And I have been thinking a lot about them during the proceedings. But they all had in common that overarching vision of better consideration and protection for Alberta's wild places and wild things. And the reaction to this idea wasn't universally accepted. Government in some quarters at least had some concerns over possible constraints on their role and activities. But despite this concern AWA universally earned enough respect among key politicians with the government party at the time, and also the opposition, to prompt them both to ask key members of the AWA group if they would join the government, both the government in office and the opposition. Now I thought we must be doing something right. Those members didn't accept those invitations. That overarching vision of Alberta was firmly fixed in their minds, and they didn't leave the AWA and take up that offer. And now... another example of the gaining of respect by the AWA: Viv earlier mentioned a deputy minister; he was deputy minister of the department that was most often on the receiving end of our suggestions and criticisms. I went to him and — the UN had offered an environmental award for individuals, for their environmental actions. I went to the deputy and asked him if he would co-sponsor two individuals from AWA for the United Nations award. And he thought about it just for seconds and he said...you know, they've always been fair with AWA and those individuals. And as I recall we put the nominations in and the award was received by the couple from the AWA. And so, you know slowly but surely we were making an impression, a favourable one. And here we are, fifty years later, with a tough-but-fair reputation, and we're looking forward to at least another fifty years and you expanded it, Mr. Mayor. Like Cliff Wallis, I don't think I'll be around that long, but we're very fortunate. We're about to have, thanks to our special guests, a permanent home, and we have a professional and passionate staff, and there's no question about that. If you read this addition which came out by coincidence, I think — it came to me in the mail today — it tells you all you need to know about the staff that we have. We have a very effective management, as has been recognized, and always, always, a cadre of top-notch volunteers who hang in there for a very long time sometimes. In fact I'm looking at faces that have been there forever. We've been very fortunate. And so I ask the members and friends and special guests to join me in a toast for AWA.



Tom Beck - Jose Quiroz

WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH

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

AWA’s board of directors and staff has developed an action plan that provides specific strategic goals and priorities for the work we strive to achieve each year. At the beginning of the year we identified priorities for our work. We have success to report in our conservation and education programs, and progress in each one of our priorities. Keeping the vision of a wilderness legacy vibrant and seeking legislated and truly protected wilderness throughout Alberta is our goal.

The work of staff conservation specialists includes developing expertise in geographic regions and specific issues of concern throughout the province and communicating findings and concerns. Conservation specialists are supported by volunteers and staff who are research and administrative associates.

We work with individuals, organizations, and industry, to achieve effective, ecosystem-based management of wild lands, wildlife, and wild waters. When necessary, we are uncompromisingly outspoken and are willing and freely able to engage politically on issues concerning wilderness conservation in the province.

The following pages provide a review of our work. We may have not achieved our vision and greatest goals of protection for critical Wild Spaces; yet we are encouraged by the progress made.

CONSERVATION

“Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.” Aldo Leopold

Critical ecosystems for some species are in jeopardy. With only 14 male greater sage-grouse remaining in Alberta time is running out for this iconic species; it is an indicator of other species at risk. With less than 1% of our native prairie designated and legally protected, our challenge has been to increase awareness and help decision makers understand the urgency of our present day circumstances. We have taken action on a number of fronts including sage-grouse, caribou, grizzly bears and several priority areas of concern. While we have focused on these priorities, work and achievements in other areas of concern has continued. We have remained strong in our messaging on conservation, on the protection of biodiversity and in the power of the people.

WILD SPACES – AWA AREAS AND ISSUES OF CONCERN

“The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need – if only we had the eyes to see.”
Edward Abbey.

WILD ALBERTA MAP

Wild Spaces and Areas of Concern are the names we use to refer to areas that are critical to a network of protected representative landscapes in Alberta. These areas and the networks they can create are the basis of our Wild Alberta map and in some ways represent a visual strategic conservation plan for AWA. This map has evolved through the years from initial hand-drawn “bubbles” to today’s more refined version that uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to detail known critical values, including Environmentally Significant Areas (ESA) in Alberta’s landscapes. Connectivity and the network are vital elements as we look to see the best of what is left; what can be restored and what is still pristine and can be true wilderness supporting vital life-giving ecosystems.

This map is shared regularly with colleagues in government, industry, and the environmental field to create a better understanding of critical ecological values and to recognize the significance of Alberta’s natural capital. It is perhaps one of our most effective educational tools.

The map has been provided in large poster format to a number of schools throughout the province. It is posted on our website to create greater accessibility and is frequently shared and used with industry partners as we help them understand the ecological values of these specific areas. The individual maps for our Areas of Concern are also posted to our website. AWA has been able to remain current with and apply state-of-the-art GIS technologies in our field work.

Maps provide AWA a means of communicating information visually, adding context to the work we do that may be difficult to communicate verbally. We now have two staff with GIS mapping as part of their education and we are finding the skills they bring valuable in our day-to-day work. Following are the mapping projects we have taken on this year:

Freshwater Campaign Website Interactive Map – A map on the Freshwater Water Campaign website highlighting stories, photos and other user-contributed content from within the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan and other rocky mountain headwaters.

Beaverhill Lake –A map of land ownership status of surrounding plots to look at potential for expansion of the Beaverhill Lake Natural Area under the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan.

Star Creek- A map of the Star Creek "Southern Rockies Watershed Project" proposed cut areas juxtaposed with declared Westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat and watercourses.

Clearwater County Development Nodes – A map of declared Clearwater County “development nodes” in the Nordegg area compared to coal policy zones and coal development and lease applications.

Coal Mines and Plants – A provincial map of coal mines, coal fields and deposits, and coal fired power plants.

Protected Area by Natural Region – An update of AWA’s ‘Wild Alberta’ map showing the percent area protected by natural region, including the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and South Saskatchewan Regional Plan protected areas.

Threats to Native Trout in the Oldman – A map of threats to Bull trout and West slope cutthroat trout in the Oldman Watershed.

Wood Bison – A map of wood bison ranges in northern Alberta.

Alberta Energy Regulator's Play-Based Regulation Pilot Project – Four fine scale maps were produced to assess the linear disturbance within the project's pilot area which also includes important caribou and fish habitat. This was completed using the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute's Human Footprint data.

American Bison in Alberta – As part of the position statement for American bison, a map was created to depict populations of plains and wood bison within Alberta using data from COSEWIC. This included the original distribution of plains bison before settlement.

Willmore Logging – An analysis of Forest Management Agreement areas bordering Willmore Wilderness Park.

Bow River Natural Regions – An analysis of Bow River watershed to confirm percent of watershed area per natural region, and human populations within watershed, for presentation on watersheds.

Bighorn Ecological Sensitive Area Comparison – A comparison and analysis of areas covered by “old” (2008) and “new” (2014) Ecological Sensitive Areas, using Bighorn Area of Concern as a reference point.

Caribou Energy Leasing – Ongoing updates (originally started in FY 2013-2014) and analysis detailing mineral lease auctions within provincial Caribou ranges.

Bighorn Trail Monitoring – Open Data Kit (ODK) using Google Mapping API to generate and maintain a map of Hummingbird Public Land Recreation Area trails with monitoring observations from Bighorn field work.

Alberta Electronic System Operator Workshop on Transmission Study Areas – Participation in Alberta Electronic System Operator workshop developing mapping-based guidelines for prioritizing siting of transmission facilities, provided AWA map layers for input into same process.

Wild Alberta



AREAS OF CONCERN

BOREAL REGION

PRIMROSE LAKELAND

Our vision for this ecologically rich area of northeast Alberta is for a significantly larger protected area and for strong management plans to retain and restore important habitat. In July 2015 we briefed the new Alberta government on the opportunity to establish large wildlife reserves on the Alberta side of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range compatible with military use, as Saskatchewan has already done. The relatively roadless Range could be an important refuge for species reliant on intact peat wetlands and older forests as Alberta's southern boreal region faces severe pressures from climate change, industrial exploitation and agricultural conversion.

AWA applauded Alberta Parks' decision in late June 2015 that they would not, after all, build five fixed roof cabins in the back country of Lakeland Provincial Park. AWA sounded the alarm in July 2013 when materials to build cabins were helicoptered in, unannounced, to a site on the Park's canoe circuit. We encouraged citizens to participate in the subsequent 2014 public consultation on these proposed cabins, and it was gratifying to see strong support for retaining the wilderness experience in that relatively unmechanized Park. We will follow up on several government pledges made after the consultation, to review increasing motorized watercraft use on the Provincial Park's lakes, and to improve maintenance of degraded trails, canoe circuit docks, and portage routes.

In June we held another popular members' hike into the Garner Orchid Fen Natural Area west of Lac La Biche. Letters from those participating in hikes over the years assisted, we believe, in Lac La Biche County's decision to establish a Natural Open Space district along the eastern edge of the Natural Area to help buffer effects from a recently approved nearby rural residential development.

MCCLELLAND LAKE

The McClelland Lake wetland complex, 85 km north of Fort McMurray, supports rare plants and provides a stopover point and breeding grounds for many bird species along one of North America's major migratory flyways. Its large patterned fens are strikingly beautiful, featuring long rows of treed peat ridges separated by shallow water pools. AWA's vision is for the entire 330 km² McClelland watershed to be designated a Provincial Park, with its two patterned fens designated Ecological Reserves.

The wetland complex is situated at the northern edge of the mineable oil sands region. Its major threat remains the potential for Suncor's Fort Hills tar sands project to mine the upper McClelland watershed and half the McClelland fen. Under the terms of Fort Hills' approvals, before entering the McClelland watershed, Suncor must develop a plan, approved by regulators, that ensures that water flows, levels and chemistry in the unmined half of the wetland complex can be maintained. To date, Suncor has not been able to develop a plan to obtain this approval. AWA continues to monitor and raise concerns about the viability of these proposals.

Since 2013, AWA has participated in the federal-provincial joint oil sands monitoring program (JOSM) as an environmental delegate to the Biodiversity component advisory committee. This provides a valuable insight into JOSM Biodiversity research; some of these projects have confirmed the importance of the McClelland wetland complex for rare and at risk migratory birds such as rusty blackbird and yellow rail. One focus of our Biodiversity committee work was to accelerate action on a promised oil sands wetlands monitoring program. The development of that program became the responsibility of the Biodiversity component this year; it remains undeveloped three years after JOSM's inception, but a work plan is finally being executed.

AWA continues to seek stronger wetland policy for oil sands region peat wetlands, which should benefit McClelland and other peat wetland complexes. We gave strong support again this year to the provincial government to complete major unfinished elements of the Lower Athabasca regional plan, including a Biodiversity Management Framework (BMF) with science-based limits, and landscape management plans with land disturbance limits. While progress is slow and its regulatory strength remains uncertain, the draft Biodiversity Management Framework did move forward this year, and it proposes to report on 'aquatic/lowland biodiversity intactness', 'aquatic native cover', 'fen cover' and 'biotic connectivity' as part of its high profile (Tier 1 and 2) indicators.

HAY-ZAMA

The Hay-Zama Lakes complex is a lowland wetland region, encompassing marshes, lakes, swamps, river deltas, woodlands, and wet meadows. In 1982 the region was designated an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971). A portion of the area (486 km²) was established as a Wildland Park under the Provincial Parks Act in 1999. In addition to providing habitat and a movement corridor for woodland caribou and other ungulates, the complex is used by a wide array of waterfowl, shorebirds, and marshbirds. The area is an ecological island in a highly degraded landscape, sitting above a productive oil and gas reserve that has been actively developed since the 1960s.

As an active member of the Hay-Zama Committee (which includes representatives from the First Nations community, government, Ducks Unlimited, and the energy industry) AWA continues to work with this committee and is pleased to see resource extraction activities have ceased and reclamation is underway. AWA promotes the Hay-Zama Committee's consensus-based, collaborative process as a model for phasing out industrial activities within protected areas and had opportunities this year to promote this model in other areas of the province.

In accordance with the 2008 MOU twinning Hay-Zama lakes with Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), AWA continues to press the Alberta Government to honour its commitments to the Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve. Staffing issues related to the remoteness of this Alberta treasure have made continuity in support and communications with our IMAR colleagues difficult. We are disappointed by the government's inability to provide consistent staffing resources for Hay-Zama Wildland Park and while the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation intended that a staff member would be in place in 2014 we have no confirmation that appointment was made.

PEACE RIVER VALLEY

The Peace River Valley is one of the most diverse and productive river valleys in the Parkland and Boreal Forest regions of Canada. It is a nationally significant waterway that supplies water to the Peace-Athabasca Delta, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. In Alberta, the river contains high species diversity of fish, and the valley's south-facing slopes still retain important prairie and parkland vegetation. Plant communities of prairie grasses and cacti support butterfly and bird species that are far to the north of other populations. The valley provides important habitat for migratory birds and resident moose, elk and deer.

AWA's work this year focused on raising awareness of the significant harm to the valley's ecological values that would result from pursuing proposals to dam the river valley for hydroelectric power. We are convinced there are plentiful opportunities for Alberta to transition to green energy without the significant damage to our vital river ecology of reservoir-based instream hydro.

Our work was significant in TransAlta's cancellation of its Dunvegan dam project. This project would have built a spillway just upstream of Dunvegan Bridge, raising the river level by 6.6 meters and creating a headpond of 26 kilometers. Due to poor project economics, in 2014 TransAlta asked the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) to extend the project's construction date deadline by 9 years. In response, AWA filed a Statement of Concern and information requests to the AUC, noting that TransAlta had not completed geotechnical, transportation and environmental studies that were supposed to fill information gaps as a condition of 2009 approvals. In January 2015, TransAlta completely withdrew the project; it cited unfavourable project economics, substantial information requests from stakeholders, and a potentially long and costly hearing process as reasons for its decision.

In summer 2015, we began a concerted effort to stop another dam project. A group of financiers is proposing the Amisk hydro project, which would place a 24-metre high dam across the river about 15 kilometres upstream from the Dunvegan Bridge. This would create a 50 kilometre long headpond, inundating river valley bottom and slopes, including native parkland vegetation areas both inside and outside of the Dunvegan West Wildland Provincial Park.

BISTCHO

The Dene Tha' of Chateh and Hay-Zama has expressed interest in seeing the Bistcho Area of Concern protected as a Wildland Park. No progress has been made on this area of concern in this fiscal year. AWA looks forward to opportunities to work for the protection of this area in northwestern Alberta as provincial planning processes for this region get underway in the near future.

CARIBOU MOUNTAINS

Caribou Mountains Wildland Park (5,910 km²) is located just west of Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Alberta. The area contains sensitive wetlands, fragile permafrost, and rare fens and palsas. The relatively undisturbed, lichen-rich forests provide crucial habitat for an important population of endangered woodland caribou that ranges over almost all of the Wildland Park. Up to 120 wood bison live in the Wentzel Lake area.

Due to the area’s isolation, and lack of good biological information, the Caribou Mountains are vulnerable to exploitation. The area contains substantial geophysical exploration disturbance. Timber harvesting has occurred along the southern edge of the caribou range, and trapping, hunting, and guiding-outfitting occur in the park. The park’s caribou herd has declined by about 75 percent since 1995, (July 2010 ASRD provincial status report) and increased motorized access would further stress this endangered species. If the insulating organic cover is disturbed by human activity, the permafrost beneath can melt, damaging vegetation, soils, and water flow regime.

In 2006 AWA participated in the local advisory committee in order to finalize the draft management plan for the park. In early 2007, AWA submitted extensive suggestions to the Alberta government, with a view to maintaining the area in its relatively undisturbed state. As of August 2015, despite assurances, the draft management plan had still not been produced.

The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2004/5 - 2013/14 provides the following qualitative assessment of current industrial/development infrastructure in the Caribou Mountains: “Substantial geophysical exploration lines. Little oil and gas development. Minimal roadway development. Timber harvesting along the southern edge of the caribou range. Severely impacted by fire over the last 20 years.”



Trailsfest Display provided an opportunity to help a number of participants learn about AWA’s work across the province. – S. Nichols

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

WILLMORE WILDERNESS PARK

At more than 1 million acres, the Willmore Wilderness Park is magnificent in the scheme of Alberta's protected areas network. Designated a park in 1959 by the provincial government, Willmore has seen little tourism or recreational development, leaving the area pristine for backcountry enthusiasts to explore. Traditional activities such as trail riding, hunting, and trapping are allowed in the park, continuing the rich heritage of aboriginal peoples and early outfitters.

The Willmore is dear to the heart of AWA as a shining example of what wilderness can and should be, though there have been battles over continued protection of the area in the past, and constant vigilance is required if protection is to be honoured in the future. That vigilance extends to civil servants who seem even more frequently to have little value or understanding of true wilderness. The push for fixed roof structures and routes to make it easy for them to access this park are ongoing.

AWA continues to press for a management plan for the Willmore Wilderness Park, as the foundation underlying any future developments in the park. There is a real danger that the many individual small decisions being made about Willmore Wilderness will produce a cumulative effect that diminishes the wilderness resource the Willmore Wilderness Act was written to protect.

Approved and proposed logging operations immediately outside the boundary of the Willmore Wilderness Provincial Park in 2014-2015 place unacceptable pressure on endangered and sensitive wildlife within the park. These operations, allowed because of the lack of any kind of buffer for the park's wildlife, highlight the need for a long-overdue comprehensive management plan for Willmore. A preliminary management plan was produced in 1980, but never completed or released. At present the Willmore Wilderness Park is adjacent to forestry tenure agreements held by four companies: West Fraser, Alberta Newsprint Company (49% owned by West Fraser), Foothills Forest Products, and Weyerhaeuser. Large cutblocks approved or proposed for harvest within the next decade line over 10 km of the park's boundary.

Proposals to add the Willmore Wilderness Park, and other areas adjacent in the Rocky Mountain Parks, to the Rocky Mountain World Heritage Site seem to have stalled completely, due largely to opposition from one local organization. AWA continues to be an enthusiastic supporter of designation and commemoration of the Willmore by the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

KAKWA

The Kakwa region is adjacent to the northernmost border of Jasper National Park, along the border of British Columbia. This area covers the most northerly portions of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta and includes South Kakwa and Caw Ridge. The area varies from mountainous terrain and alpine meadows in the south to rolling hills covered in forest in the north and east. AWA has called Caw Ridge "Alberta's Serengeti" due to the plentiful and diverse wildlife populations the ridge supports and nurtures.

AWA continues to oppose development on Caw Ridge and will continue to oppose applications for coal mining, and other industrial developments, in this sensitive wilderness.

The Government of Canada passed new greenhouse gas legislation in 2012 that limits the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by coal-fired generation facilities. As a result, Maxim Power Corporation applied to amend their original permit to expand the existing HR Milner Generating Station, a 150-megawatt coal-fired power plant located north of Grande Cache, Alberta. AWA opposed this original expansion and was pleased that Maxim's amendment proposal to convert the fuel source from coal to natural gas was approved by Alberta Utilities Commission on June 4, 2014.

In 2013-2014 AWA attended a two day reclamation foundation workshop hosted by Grande Cache Coal (GCC). AWA presented on reclamation priorities for No.12 B2 open pit mine and ways to avoid surface mining on Caw Ridge due to its environmental significance. GCC does not have any short term plans to mine Caw Ridge; their current focus is on previously mined areas. Following the workshop, GCC underwent some major staff changes in the environment/reclamation department. AWA continues to monitor their reclamation progress and future mining plans.

In March 2015, the Alberta government delayed extensive new energy rights sales planned in an endangered mountain caribou range in the Kakwa region. This deferral occurred one day after an AWA news release highlighting the issue.

LITTLE SMOKY

The Little Smoky region's foothills forests are now highly fragmented by intensive forestry and energy surface disturbance. However, these relatively wet and cool forests will be an important refuge for forest species under a range of climate change scenarios. Endangered Little Smoky – A La Peche caribou populations are, at best, barely stabilized by a 9-year provincial government wolf cull that is an unethical band-aid substitute for addressing industrial habitat destruction that drives caribou population declines. The Alberta government has chosen these two woodland caribou ranges to develop precedent-setting range plans required under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. For now, the area still contains a very important native fishery: some small creeks and rivers still support threatened Athabasca rainbow trout; some support threatened bull trout, and many support arctic grayling, a species of special concern. AWA continues to work for the long-term protection and restoration of the Little Smoky.

Until December 2014, AWA continued to participate as an environmental sector delegate in the Alberta government's Little Smoky – A La Peche caribou range planning multi-sector group. After December, the group ceased activities and an industry-government group carried on, excluding environmental non-government organization (ENGO) participation. In summer 2015 AWA briefed the new provincial government on the importance of including environmental voices again: we received word in early autumn 2015 that ENGOs would be included once more.

Since autumn 2014, AWA has also engaged with the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) to advance cumulative effects management in the Little Smoky. The AER's Duvernay play-based regulation (PBR) pilot was supposed to provide a tool for improved environmental impacts management, yet the pilot period started (and ended) without any land disturbance cumulative impact rules or ecologically-based water management plans in place. In the first half of 2015, AWA submitted Statements of Concern on five energy company PBR applications that did not address cumulative impacts of regional land and

water issues. Working with other environmental and conservation groups, AWA raised strong concerns with the new provincial government and AER about inadequate monitoring of stream and lake flows, water diversion audits and sediment controls, as well as proliferating linear disturbance far in excess of what caribou and native fish can tolerate. In summer 2015, we learned that a cross-ministry group was working to pilot the administration of cumulative impacts management in this area.

BIGHORN WILDLAND

AWA has had a long-standing interest in the Bighorn Wildland ever since the organization's earliest days in the 1960s. At more than 4,000 km², the Bighorn is a large and intact wilderness that retains its ecological integrity largely due to the absence of roads and industrialized access, yet it remains primarily unprotected.

AWA is pressing for the protection of the Bighorn as a Wildland Provincial Park under the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP). We have advocated for this outcome at multiple NSRP stakeholder meetings, as well as in submissions to the Land Use Secretariat, as well as communications with the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC). At the time that the NSRP process was initiated, this designation would have implied a transition of the Bighorn management to be under the purview of the ministry of Tourism Parks and Recreation, however since this time the responsibility for parks and that for public lands have been merged under the new ministry of Environment and Parks (AEP). The goal of having the Bighorn designated a park nevertheless remains unchanged.

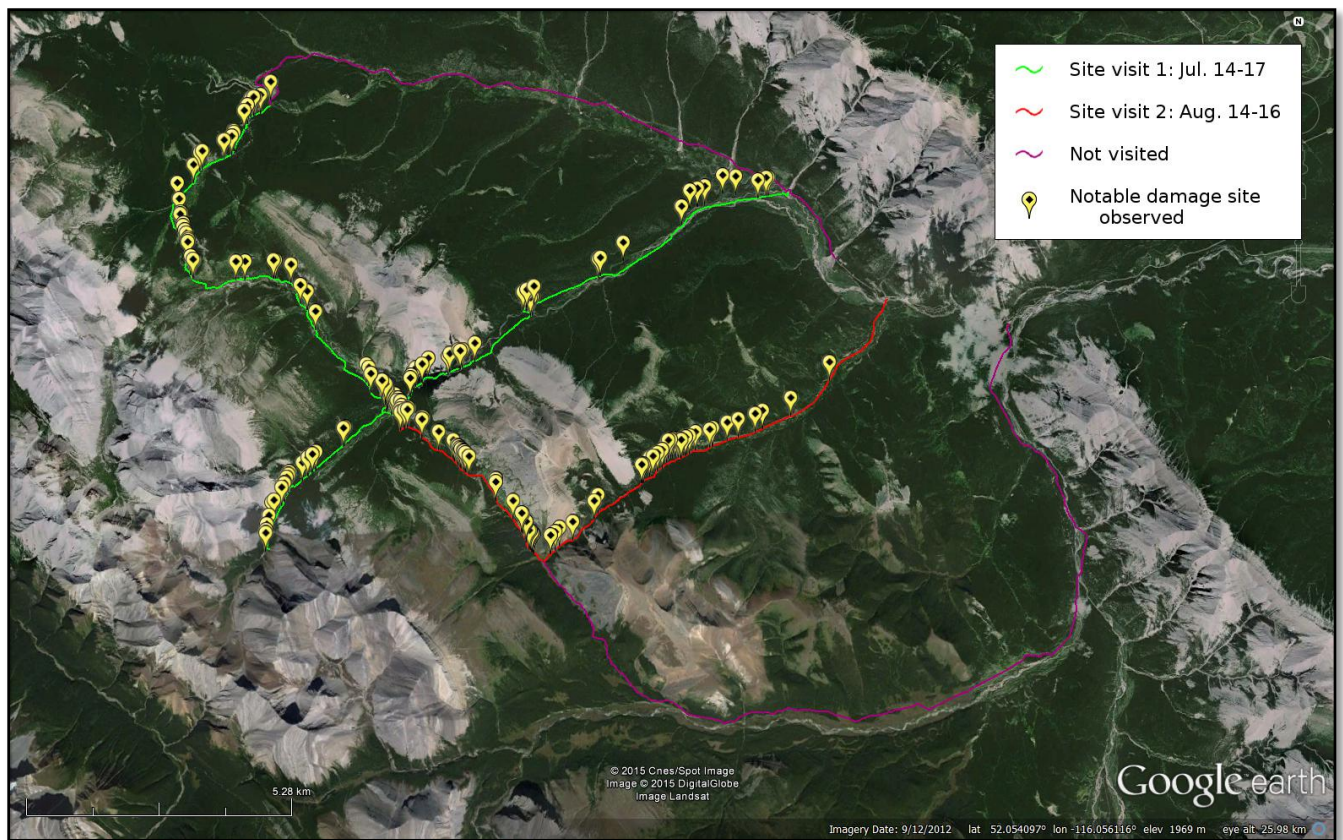
In the meantime, AWA continues to monitor the motorized trail network in the area of the Upper Ram/Clearwater Forest Land Use Zone, as we have done since access was officially granted to motorized recreationists in 2002. Two multi-day backpacking trips were conducted in the summer of 2015 on the trail network adjacent to the Hummingbird Public Lands Recreation Area. Both trips were conducted by AWA staff with assistance from volunteers recruited via AWA's Freshwater Campaign being undertaken in concert with Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC). Overall, nearly 50 km of trail were monitored over the two trips. These were performed as a follow-up to similar trips to monitor the Canary Creek trail made in 2012, 2013 and 2014. On the 2015 trip, the trails reconstructed following 2012 and 2013 floods in the area were observed to be undergoing continued degradation. The new trails, acknowledged by the ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) as having been created by volunteers, were constructed without concern for existing vegetation, waterways or biological systems, and without any preventative measures to avoid future significant erosion or other damage. As anticipated, notable erosion on the new trails was therefore seen, despite two relatively dry seasons in 2013-2014, and in 2014-2015. A new section of trail was also observed this year, this one constructed in 2014 under the authority of ESRD's Backcountry Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program. Unfortunately, despite the obvious usage of more resources and sophisticated equipment, this trail does not appear to be any more sustainable than those constructed by volunteers, and it is anticipated that significant failure will be encountered in the coming few years.

In presentations to ESRD staff, AWA continues to reiterate our 2012 argument that the damage is an indication that the topography, soil, and vegetation of the region are not suited to withstand motorized recreation. AWA has asked that these trails remain permanently closed to motorized vehicles; the damage is so severe it is doubtful they can be restored by either natural processes or volunteer trail stewardship groups. There has been acknowledgement among the ESRD staff that many of the areas of the Bighorn are unsuited to support motorized recreational activity; however they maintain that trails

and wet conditions will be accounted for on a year by year basis. AWA continues to advocate for permanent trail closures within the Prime Protection Zone of the Eastern Slopes. AWA also continues to advocate for the designation of the Bighorn as a Wildland Park under the NSRP. A followup discussion is anticipated in the fall of 2015.

As has occurred every year in the duration of the project, AWA conducted two additional trips to download TRAFx units buried at strategic points on the Upper Ram/Clearwater motorized access trail system. Concern over ongoing illegal use, and associated erosion and significant sedimentation and siltation from motorized crossings of streams, remains paramount in our push to have these trails closed. Our work in this area is dependent on volunteers and we will maintain our presence monitoring the motorized access and damaged sites. AWA routinely monitors minutes from the government's Bighorn Backcountry Monitoring Committee.

AWA's Bighorn monitoring work received very good media exposure in the spring and summer of 2015, especially following a story by an investigative reporter working for the Canadian Press. This also coincided with heightened interest in AWA news releases regarding enhanced enforcement initiatives regarding OHV abuse in the Bighorn and North Saskatchewan areas. The enhanced enforcement included proactive efforts by RCMP officers in Clearwater County to monitor and charge offenders, an initiative that AWA is happy to help publicize.



Bighorn trail monitoring work - observations of notable damage in the 2015 season

BIGHORN HISTORIC TRAIL

Since 1994, AWA has worked to open and maintain the Historic Bighorn Trail between Crescent Falls on the Bighorn River and the Wapiabi, Blackstone and Chungo Gaps. The 2013 June floods have put this work in jeopardy, and there has been no maintenance done in either 2014. 2015 was a far drier year than the previous two, so we were able to negotiate more of the trail and do a survey of work needed, although we did not look at the Vimy-Bighorn section. Instead, we packed in to the George Creek area from where we assessed several side trails and the main trail down to the Blackstone River. The side trail up Hogg Creek (and onto Vimy Ridge) was quite passable even with flood alterations. The route up an open ridge north of Vimy Ridge was also passable with minor cutting needed. A route that mainly follows old seismic lines and goes west to Mons Creek from the Beeman camp on George Creek and circles back to the large George Creek meadows and camps, was also passable by saddle horse, but would have been a challenge for a pack string.

Flooding and brush growth have made the trail down narrow George Creek from the large open meadows to the Beeman camp nasty to negotiate, especially for a pack string. This stretch of about 4-5 km needs concerted work, especially to cut back brush and to move the trail away from steep, eroding banks. Clayton Grosso, one of the long time outfitter hunting out of this area, died this past winter and his son now operates the hunting business. AWA has not seen this camp in such a state of accumulated mess since the 1980's when AWA, with AFS helicopter assistance, cleaned all old outfitter camps within the Bighorn Wildland. This camp needs official attention as it is accumulating garbage and effluvia at an unprecedented rate.

AWA has been in communication with staff from ESRD's Backcountry Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program seeking support; and we are hopeful support for this trail will be given priority.



Volunteers and staff on Hummingbird Trail System conducting measurements and monitoring.

SOUTHERN EASTERN SLOPES REGION

AWA works towards protection and better management of wilderness throughout the Southern Eastern Slopes Region particularly in those areas we have identified as Wild Spaces. From Waterton National Park to the South Ghost areas. AWA has been working on a number of collaborative initiatives and responding to local member interests and concerns. The region is a crucial mountain ecosystem, covering the land across Alberta, British Columbia and Montana. In Alberta, an area often referred to as the Crown of the Continent stretches from southern Kananaskis Country south to Waterton National Park. It approximates to the Southern Eastern Slopes region, headwaters of the South Saskatchewan River system and the source of clean water across southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Three of AWA's Areas of Concern fall within the Crown of the Continent, the Livingstone-Porcupine, Castle and Waterton Parkland areas. Just north of the Crown, within the Southern Eastern Slopes Region AWA focuses on the South Ghost and Kananaskis Country,

SOUTH GHOST - GHOST-WAIPAROUS

AWA's main interest in this area is to ensure that wilderness, wildlife, and water quality and quantity are considered in all decisions that are made in the region that is adjacent to - and forms the transition zone for - the South Ghost area. We continue to wait for action by Alberta Environment & Parks to enlarge the protected area of the Don Getty Wildland Park as proposed in the SSRP.

The Ghost Watershed Alliance Society (GWAS) has continued with an ecosystem-based planning and conservation project for the Ghost River Watershed. The project has involved the community in examining what sustainable forest management is, and how such a model could be applied in the Ghost Watershed. GWAS is currently working on a State of the Watershed Report that is hoped, by 2016, will lay the foundation for a Watershed Management Plan for the Ghost River watershed. A formal Steering Committee of stakeholders, government and local experts has been established that provides input and feedback as the report is developed.

AWA continues to have a representative on the Ghost Stewardship and Monitoring Committee, a group of stakeholders whose purpose is to ensure reasonable area access to all users while protecting the character of the region. The activity in the year has been minimal.

KANANASKIS COUNTRY

AWA continues to work with Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition (BCEC) as part of Fish and Forest work, although developments in Kananaskis are quiet for now. A communiqué was developed from AWA's Fish, Forests, and Flood Resiliency Forum in June 2014 to guide future AWA work and provide principles for ongoing discussions with decision makers about Alberta's Eastern Slopes. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) established several expansions of existing provincial parks and recreation areas within Kananaskis including Elbow Valley Provincial Park's 333ha expansion and Sibbald Lake Provincial Recreation Area's 83ha expansion. A patchwork of conservation areas has been established by the SSRP, including a 453ha expansion of Blue Creek Wildland Provincial Park within the Kananaskis area. This is a small step towards increased connectivity for wildlife along the south Eastern Slopes but much more is needed. AWA continues to push for more connectivity and wildlife movement corridors between established protected areas.

AWA believes that extensive improvements in operating standards for Spray Lake Sawmills are required for the company to maintain their Forest Stewardship Council certification, granted on a temporary basis in the fall of 2013 and ratified a year later. AWA was extremely disappointed in the results of an October 2014 audit led by Bureau Veritas Certification. We continue to submit concerns regarding Spray Lake's forestry operations in the Ghost and Kananaskis, as well as Bureau Veritas' certification process.

Kananaskis Country was extensively changed, and a great deal of existing human infrastructure was damaged, by the floods of June 2013. In outreach activities following the flood, AWA called for actions to restore and sustain watershed ecology and reduce existing linear disturbance in Kananaskis that reduces water absorption and increases sediment and contaminant transport. In July 2014, the Government of Alberta approved the rebuilding of Kananaskis Golf Course in Evan Thomas Creek floodway for \$18 million, although some of those funds were later put on hold following allegations in the media of secret backroom deals with companies connected to the provincial government at the time.

Kananaskis Country remains an important focus of AWA's outreach and winter outdoor activities. In post-2013 flood recovery, AWA continues to be a voice for actions that work with rather than against watershed ecology in the Kananaskis and elsewhere. We presented to a provincial water conference on our concerns for the illusory silver bullet of hugely costly and risky dam infrastructure in Kananaskis headwaters areas. We also requested the Alberta government refrain from rebuilding the Kananaskis Golf Course right across the floodway of the Evan Thomas Creek.

CASTLE WILDLAND

The final version of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) was released July 23, 2014. While some improvements were made from the draft, it fell short from the long awaited expectations of having the entire 10,000 hectares of the Castle designated as a Wildland Provincial Park. Instead, a 54,588-ha Castle Wildland Provincial Park was designated but left many of the important valley bottoms and biodiversity hotspots outside of the park boundaries. The remaining area in the Castle was designated as a public land use zone (PLUZ), allowing industry encroachment. Since the SSRP was completed and implemented, lines of communication have remained open with the Government of Alberta and AWA has continued to push for increased protection in the remainder Castle area not included in the Wildland Park. A new Alberta government, elected in May 2015, promised to protect the entire Castle wilderness in their election platform. This renewed optimism in the coalition of groups, including AWA, fighting to protect the entire Castle and revived another Castle campaign to encourage the government to follow through on their promise. The campaign and dialogue with government officials is ongoing.

Throughout early 2013, AWA became aware of a joint project between ESRD and departments at various educational facilities including the University of Alberta, to log part of Star Creek, immediately outside the Special Management Area but still within AWA's Castle Area of Concern. The project purports to study the effects of logging operations on water quantity and quality. However with Star Creek being some of the last remaining habitat for the threatened westslope cutthroat trout, AWA does not believe this is an appropriate time or location for such a project. Despite AWA and its members' numerous objections to the controversial "experimental" logging of Star Creek, the logging was

approved and commenced in the fall of 2014. The contract was given to a BC logging company, Canfor. AWA staff and volunteers visited the Star Creek valley to tour the area and photograph the access road and sedimentation potential into Girardi Creek, a tributary of Star Creek and critical habitat of westslope cutthroat trout. Using the photos to put pressure on both Canfor and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), mitigation measures were put in place. AWA continues to visit the area and has members monitoring the sedimentation entering into those nearby streams.

AWA has continued its dialogue with Shell Canada to work towards improved management in the Castle Area, particularly reclamation of old wells and industrial roads.

Several AWA members after visiting several of the Front Range canyons of the Castle approached AWA staff with concerns about the overgrazing and cattle mismanagement they observed. In response AWA sent a letter of concern to ESRD in October 2014. AWA subsequently met with government representatives on two occasions to understand how Range Management Plans (RMPs) were developed and implemented and the tools government agrologists use to help guide range management. AWA highlighted the lack of public transparency with RMPs and stressed that without proper resources to manage the grazing in those areas, grazing leases should no longer be available. As with the rest of the Castle, AWA continues to advocate for restrictions on land use such as grazing leases that the sensitive biodiversity of the area cannot withstand.



50 conservationists climbed Table Mountain to draw attention to the need to protect the Castle

LIVINGSTONE-PORCUPINE

In this Wild Space AWA's major concerns continue to be not only the ongoing industrial-scale logging and motorized recreation in sensitive watersheds but also new threats to the area in the form of renewed coal development interests and pollution from earlier coal mining activities.

Benga Mining Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Riversdale Resources Limited, is proposing to develop and operate an open-pit metallurgical coal mine approximately seven kilometres north of Blairmore, in south-west Alberta's Crowsnest Pass. The company is expecting production capacity to be a maximum of four million tonnes of clean coal per year over a mine-life of about 25 years. Ever since the coal mine was first proposed, AWA has raised serious concerns about the need for the project and the high environmental risks.

Within the last year, a loose coalition of individuals, environmental groups (including AWA), locals and landowners has formed as 'Friends of Grassy Mountain.' The purpose of the coalition is to share information and to raise awareness about the risks of re-opening a mine and how it will affect adjacent landowners, surrounding communities, and the ecological health of the area. The general consensus of the group is that the overall costs of the mine project if it is approved will outweigh the benefits.

One of the concerns of the group, which AWA has pointed out in several letters to both provincial and federal governments, is the threat of contamination and degradation to the nearby Gold and Blairmore Creeks. Both creeks are listed on the westslope cutthroat trout federal recovery strategy as critical habitat, containing pure-strain populations of this threatened species.

Another related concern that AWA has also raised is the lack of proper reclamation done on Grassy Mountain from previous coal mining half a century ago. Historical coal or tailings piles combined with current exploratory drilling may have already caused damage to Gold Creek. After several storm events in mid July, significant amounts of a black substance were found in the creek and eventually made their way into the Crowsnest River. The Alberta Energy Regulator continues to investigate the matter and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) was notified.

The extensive land alterations caused by a now abandoned open pit mine and the potentially severe adverse effects on the environment have triggered a full independent panel review by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA). CEAA has begun conducting its environmental assessment for this project proposal with several public consultation phases. The 'Friends of Grassy Mountain,' will engage in the review process and prepare for the review panel hearings.

The C5 Forest Management Unit remains an active file of AWA, and we continue to oppose any further industrial logging in the Bow and Oldman watersheds. There continue to be clear cuts occurring in proximity to important streams and rivers containing species at risk.

Rampant off-highway vehicle (OHV) usage, in general, and OHV events in particular are also a major issue in this area and have caused extensive damage in certain areas through the lack of proper government regulations and enforcement. AWA has expressed concern that better OHV management is needed and resources allocated to ensure OHV usage is restricted, overseen, and kept away from water courses or wetland areas of any kind. Since 2011, ten officially authorized OHV racing events have taken place on public lands in the headwaters areas of the Livingstone-Porcupine. No environmental or field

inspections of the races are carried out during these events and Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) officers typically do not attend the events.

This year, AWA met with AESRD staff regarding these events and were told the OHV event organizers were granted permission via *Temporary Field Authority* (TFA) permits – a tool originally intended to facilitate industrial access. Because of the nature of the TFA (the only regulatory tool available), there are no registration, administration or other fees levied by AESRD for the events. AESRD's on-the-ground inspections are limited to performing pre- and post- event audits and sees their role mainly to educate not enforce. Races are supposed to use existing trails but without a designated trails network or recreation management plan for the Livingstone-Porcupine, it is difficult to ensure new trails are not being created specifically for event purposes. AWA proposed the use of private lands that would offer similar terrain challenges to the racers and a potential revenue stream to the landowner, especially where the land is agriculturally marginal. AWA strongly encouraged increased assessment, accountability, enforcement and the ability for Fish and Wildlife division to veto race events on sensitive public lands.

AWA has also supported local efforts of the Livingstone Landowners Group (LLG) opposing the transmission line proposal of Altalink. The Castle Rock Ridge to Chapel Rock Transmission Project if approved will add another linear disturbance through an area highly valued for its aesthetics, wildlife habitat, and watersheds. Efforts are ongoing.

A group of individuals, organizations (including AWA), and municipalities concerned about the land, water and livelihoods in the Porcupine Hills, has formed a loose coalition in the past year. It was formed as a result of the government recreation management planning as part of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. The coalition has submitted several documents to the provincial government including a set of principles that should be considered with any land-use planning in the Porcupine Hills. The coalition supports a clear recognition of the watershed and biodiversity values first and foremost and an integrated approach of land-use planning that considers the conservation initiatives on private land and is also in the context of the entire Eastern Slopes. AWA advocated with the group that key studies and reports that have been already developed should be the foundation of sub-regional plans.

WATERTON PARKLAND

The Waterton Parkland area consists mostly of private land to the east of Waterton Lakes National Park. Increasingly, landowners in this region are looking at ways to minimize the impacts of development on this landscape, as well as develop programs to minimize conflicts with wildlife.

AWA supported a landowners group fighting against a ranch and retreat development application at Police Lake. In February 2015, the Cardston councilors voted against this application. The landowners, as well as AWA, were pleased with this decision, a win for the environment and local people. The applicant can reapply so AWA will continue to watch out for proposals in the Waterton Parkland area and support landowner groups working so hard to keep the area healthy for wilderness and wildlife.

A local initiative, initially spearheaded by the Drywood Yarrow Conservation Partnership and now also taken up by the Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association in cooperation with local municipal governments, is looking at ways for local communities to live alongside carnivore populations; grizzly bear populations in particular may be expanding eastwards, and a range of attractant management

programs are being developed to help reduce human-bear conflicts. Carcass disposal bins, reinforced grain stores and electric fencing to protect silage stores and beehives are all being used extensively. AWA supports these innovative programs which will hopefully work to the benefit of both bears and people.

PARKLAND REGION

RUMSEY

Aspen parkland once stretched over 255,000 km² in the Prairie Provinces. In Alberta, the Central Parkland Natural Subregion sweeps in a wide arc from Airdrie to north of Edmonton, and east to Lloydminster and Provost. Today, the Rumsey Natural Area and Ecological Reserve (together, the *Rumsey Block*) are surrounded by a checkerboard of cropland. In fact, Rumsey is the only large, relatively undisturbed area of aspen groveland on hummocky disintegration moraine left in world. It represents a landscape that is almost extinct and provides a valuable ecological benchmark.

Progress is finally being made on the protection of Rumsey Natural Area from continuing industrial disturbance. As of February 29, 2012, addenda on all new petroleum and natural gas agreements within the Rumsey Natural Area now read "Surface Access is Not Permitted." Previously, leases were sold with "Surface Access Subject to Restrictions." AWA regards this as an encouraging first step in the long-term phase out of oil and gas activity in the Natural Area.

The long-awaited management plan for Rumsey has finally been begun by Alberta Parks, and AWA is providing assistance and advice as the planning process takes shape. We saw a confidential draft in 2015 and continue to ask for the draft to be provided for public consultation as soon as possible. There is no explanation given for the delay.

WAINWRIGHT DUNES

AWA serves on the advisory group for the Wainwright Dunes and monitors implementation of the management plan approved in 1999 for this nationally significant parkland sand dune and wetland wilderness. Elk populations continue to grow in the protected area and surrounding lands and may outstrip the capacity of the area in the near future. We learned in August 2015 that the advisory group has been meeting and AWA was no longer on the invitation list. That has been rectified and we will be invited to any future meetings. AWA continues to monitor the situation.

ANTELOPE HILLS PROVINCIAL PARK

During this year a newly created 380 hectare Provincial Park near Hanna was announced. A generous donor Gottlob Schmidt has donated the land on which he lived and ranched. He has made stipulations that the park will have no off highway vehicle access and be for foot access only. AWA staff were able to tour the new park with Parks Alberta staff in July. The park is not open to the public and will not be for some time. Parks agrologists, botanists and biologists are conducting extensive baseline surveys of this beautiful parkland landscape park. AWA was so very pleased to

see this addition to the Alberta Parks system and thank Mr. Schmidt for his generosity and foresight in designating this park.



Cliff Wallis and Ksenija Vujovnic (AEP) at Antelope Hills Provincial Park

GRASSLANDS REGION

Protected area targets have not been met in the Grassland Natural Region in Alberta which are far less than the global 12% recommended by the Brundtland Commission. Less than 1% of the Foothills Fescue and Mixedgrass Natural Subregions have any legal protective designation. The Northern Great Plains ecoregion has been identified as a global priority for conservation and protection as one of the World Wildlife Fund's Global 200 ecoregions. Temperate grasslands are the biome most at risk in the world. Birds that nest in temperate grasslands are the most rapidly declining group of birds in North America. Large, relatively undisturbed blocks of native grassland are few in Alberta. Much of the native grassland is fragmented or degraded. Although native grasslands are only about five percent of Alberta's land base, they support approximately half of the rare ecological communities, 40% of rare vascular plant species and 70% of mammal, bird, reptile and amphibian species considered "at risk" or "may be at risk". The remaining large blocks of native grassland are extremely significant for biodiversity conservation and their protection is essential if we are to achieve protected area targets in Alberta.

MIDDLE SAND HILLS

The Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern lies forty miles north of the city of Medicine Hat, to the west of the South Saskatchewan River, and to the south of the Red Deer River. It is approximately 2,480 km² in size. Relatively untouched until recent years, the near-native conditions in the Middle Sand Hills area are reminiscent of the great plains as they once were. The extensive mixed grasslands, sand hills, coulees

and wetlands that comprise the Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern are home to 1,100 native prairie species, including 13 federal Species at Risk and 78 provincially listed “at risk” species.

A large portion of the Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern lies within the boundaries of the Canadian Forces Base (C.F.B.) Suffield military reserve. As such, the military is intricately tied to the history, and fate, of this wildland. Since 1971, the Department of National Defence has recognized the fragility of the area and has zoned the eastern part of the base out-of-bounds for military training.

SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA

The Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA), designated as a federally-protected wildlife refuge in 2003, lies within CFB Suffield and is one of the last six remaining large native grasslands left in the glaciated northern plains. The NWA comprises 458 km² of rare unbroken prairie containing landscapes of national significance, including sand hills, ancient glacial coulees, and the stunning South Saskatchewan River valley. Home to more than 1,100 species of plants and animals, the NWA is a haven for 94 species of concern, 18 of which are federally-listed species at risk of extinction. It also contains numerous historical sites such as medicine wheels, bison kill sites, and stone cairns. Many of the area’s dinosaur remains and fossilized trees remain unclassified.

AWA is working toward increased protection and more ecologically sensitive management of the larger Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern and hope to see a long-promised management planning process underway soon. Throughout this past year there have been inquiries about the grazing of cattle and the management of elk and how it may be impacting the NWA and the local ranchers who ranch the land adjacent to the NWA. In general, AWA is not in favor nor opposed to an elk hunt at Suffield NWA provided it is done on foot and the need to control numbers of wildlife is demonstrated. The situation at Suffield is somewhat more complicated as historical predators of elk, e.g. Grizzly Bear and Wolf, no longer roam the military base area. Despite some outspoken views from some ranchers, AWA remains unconvinced that elk are yet overpopulating/overgrazing the Suffield NWA. While some in the ranching community characterize the elk herd as too large in the NWA, AWA believes it a subjective opinion and not one founded in science. There are certainly far more cattle on the southern Alberta landscape than elk.

AWA has been asking the federal government for a management plan for the National Wildlife Area for almost a decade. While it has been promised many times, there have been no public consultations and no significant movement to release a draft plan for public review. Such a plan offers the best hope that a science-based approach to wildlife protection and management will be implemented with a reasonable measure of public involvement.

MILK RIVER-SAGE CREEK

The Milk River-Sage Creek Area of Concern comprises three main units:

- Cypress Hills — a montane outlier with forests and lush fescue grasslands;
- Pakowki Lake — an area of sandhills and a large playa lake that is very productive for waterfowl and shorebirds in wetter years;
- The balance of the area, a diverse area encompassing the Milk River Canyon and associated badlands as well as some of the most extensive native mixed grassland, silver sagebrush and ephemeral wetland habitat in Canada.

The Milk River-Sage Creek area is one of the least fragmented, most extensive, and most geologically and biologically diverse grassland landscapes on the glaciated plains of North America. Its uplands, wetlands, and valleys constitute one of the largest undisturbed grasslands in Canada. The 5,000 km² Milk River-Sage Creek area is a natural diversity hotspot in the grasslands of southeastern Alberta. For generations, this wilderness has been protected by its isolation and by grazing patterns that have perpetuated the richness and diversity of the native grassland. Those factors are changing rapidly. There is a high degree of urgency to protect the area. The extreme southeastern corner of Alberta was once the forgotten corner but it is forgotten no more. Recent activity by oil and gas companies around the Cypress Hills gives every indication that it will turn parts of the study area into highly developed landscapes like the rest of Alberta.

AWA believes the future of the area as a wild place and as a refuge for native plants and animals that have long disappeared from much of the Great Plains rests in our hands. As part of our annual hikes program a day hike into the Sage Creek area was conducted.

CYPRESS HILLS

The Cypress Hills, which span the southern Alberta-Saskatchewan border, are recognized internationally as a significant natural area. The upper portion of the hills is part of the Montane Natural Subregion, having been left unglaciated during the last ice age. The hills are surrounded by native grassland, and the meeting of the diverse communities of flora and fauna from these two natural regions creates a unique and valuable ecological resource.

In the Cypress Hills Fringe Area Structure Plan, Cypress County initially recognized the importance of preserving a buffer zone around Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park. When wind farms were proposed in the Fringe, AWA was among those who spoke out in favour of the intent of the Fringe plan, which opposes industrialization in the area. AWA continues to oppose development in the Fringe Area. Regrettably, the proposals have not been denied by the government. We continue to monitor wind farm proposals in this area and across Alberta in our areas of interest.

PAKOWKI LAKE

Pakowki Lake Area of Concern is located southeast of the Cypress Hills and north of the Milk River, in the Grassland Natural Region. An area of national environmental significance, it encompasses the large, intermittent lake itself, as well as the surrounding prairie uplands and a large sand dune-wetland complex, including extensive bulrush marshes. Pakowki Lake is an important staging area for migrating shorebirds and provides nesting sites for birds that occur in few other places in Canada. The area is also important for the rare and uncommon plants found in the sand dune and wetland habitats. A number of endangered species live in the Pakowki Lake region, including the greater sage-grouse, which has been federally listed as endangered.

None of the Pakowki Lake Area of Concern has provincial or federal protected status, although a portion is designated as a game bird sanctuary. Pakowki Lake is designated an Important Bird Area (IBA). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified Pakowki Lake as a Category IV Habitat/Species Management Area, meaning it should be managed mainly for conservation of habitats

and biodiversity. The Pakowki sandhills are public land held under grazing lease; some cultivation has taken place on adjacent parcels of privately owned land.

AWA believes Pakowki Lake should be formally recognized for its national environmental significance with legislated provincial protection unfortunately. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan identifies this area for future grassland conservation but does not prohibit new industrial development while planning is ongoing.

MILK RIVER RIDGE

This area is known for its sensitive Foothills Grasslands, productive wetlands and the only open plains habitat for Grizzly Bears in Alberta. Oil and gas development in the Alberta Bakken is surrounding the few remaining intact patches. The local leaseholders want protection under Heritage Rangeland designation and, with the encouragement of the AWA at public information sessions; the Alberta government has recognized the area as needing protection in the recently released South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. AWA continues to work with government and the Alberta Energy Regulator to restrict industrial development in this area and achieve formal protected area status. During the past year we have pressed for protection of this area. Recently we learned that sensitive rough fescue and mixed grasslands on the Milk River Ridge are being opened up to oil exploration activity. At the same time, efforts to secure legal designation for these lands are being delayed until the Government of Alberta releases its South Saskatchewan Region Plan (SSRP). At the time of writing this report, the SSRP has not formalized any conservation commitments in the South Saskatchewan Region.

MILK RIVER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

After more than three decades of involvement, AWA continues to participate, as a member of the Milk River Management Committee and Milk River Management Society (MRMS), in formal stewardship of the Milk River Natural Area. This rolling grassland in extreme southeastern Alberta contains a wide variety of habitats supporting hundreds of native species, some of which are endangered. AWA works alongside representatives from the local county, the ranching community, the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, and provincial government agencies.

The decision to form the MRMS and create a lease for the area came out of the management planning process in the 1980s. As part of its mandate, the MRMS is responsible for administering the grazing contract and long-term research monitoring, which has been ongoing since the early 1990s. This region is perhaps the longest continuously monitored grassland site in the province, at least in terms of biodiversity.

The Management Society has installed traffic counters to establish current levels of vehicle usage. An old wellsite road gives vehicles access to the edge of the Milk River Canyon, leaving 80 percent of the Natural Area upland free of vehicle traffic. However, Encana Corporation has developed a number of wells next to the Natural Area, with gravel track access almost to the boundary. The Natural Area is currently unregulated with respect to vehicle use. The society is concerned that this could open the area to increased and undesirable use. Formally monitoring vehicle use will provide baseline information so that concerns can be expressed promptly if increases are detected.

The MRMS generally meets twice a year and will continue to manage this area with maintenance of ecological integrity as a priority. Over the years, the local representatives have taken ownership, responding appropriately to threats to the area. Along with the Hay-Zama Committee in the far northwest of the province, the MRMS is an excellent example of collaborative management of a protected area.

PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM

The Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) is a large voluntary coalition of stakeholder groups whose members are interested in the conservation of native prairie and parkland environments in Alberta. AWA is a sponsor of the Forum and participates in quarterly meetings of the group that includes a diverse membership of those concerned with prairie conservation. This year the forum was able to provide a small grant to AWA for the Kids Wilderness Defenders Camp Program that focused on Grasslands.

The PCF allows many stakeholder groups across southern Alberta, concerned with the security of native prairie and parkland, to use a common platform to share information, collaborate on projects and promote conservation through education and stewardship.

The PCF was established in 1989 by the provincial government in response to a Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP) developed initially by the World Wildlife Fund. The first PCAP was a prairie wide plan crossing several provincial borders. It was developed as a five-year blueprint focused on efforts to conserve and manage native prairie species, communities, and habitats. Since the first PCAP, the PCF has taken over the lead organizational role, solely within Alberta, on developing subsequent PCAPs. The PCF has grown over the last three decades and now comprises over fifty member organizations spanning government, industry, academia and environmental groups, including AWA.

The latest PCAP expires at the end of 2015, so the PCF director and members have begun developing the next five year action plan. AWA participated in a PCF survey and facilitated a workshop in November 2014 to provide input on the direction and desired outcomes of the next PCAP (2016-2020). The overarching outcomes from the PCAP are to maintain large native prairie and parkland landscapes, conserve connecting corridors for biodiversity, and protect isolated habitats. The aim of the next PCAP is to build on these outcomes by planning more short and medium term activities that work toward measurable results. The idea is not to re-invent the wheel but to evaluate progress of the last five years and decide what continues to be a priority and what can be added to the next plan. Areas that were discussed as critical align with AWA grassland and parkland areas of concern including the Milk River Ridge, the Wainwright Dunes, and Wild Horse Plains in the southeast corner of the province.

AWA believes the PCF meetings are also an important way to meet with representatives from many different interests and perspectives. Member updates are helpful to learn about the work different groups are doing. Not every member has the same objectives but everyone is at the table for a common goal – native prairie and parkland conservation. AWA will continue to contribute to the development of the next PCAP and work with others to achieve this common goal.

FOOTHILLS RESTORATION FORUM

AWA has been a member of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Foothills Restoration Forum and attends meetings of the forum. The multi-stakeholder group is looking at best practices for restoring fescue grasslands.

AWA strongly supports three main principles for minimizing disturbance in native prairie:

1. Avoidance of disturbance must take priority over any mitigation of damage.
2. If avoidance is not possible, disturbance should be minimized and
3. Incremental environmental effects must be avoided.

The forum provides opportunity for informed debate and discussion. AWA continues to engage wind energy companies and distribute the document *Minimizing Disturbance of Alberta's Native Prairie by Wind Energy Development* developed as part of our work with the forum.



AWA staff and volunteers with children at Big Hill Springs Camp Day - C.Olson

WATER

AWA's vision is that for the well-being of all living things, Alberta has healthy, natural ecosystems in its river headwaters; there is plentiful clean water for all Albertans; there is province-wide awareness and stewardship of water as a precious, life-giving resource; and there is effective, ecosystem-based management of Alberta's watersheds, groundwater, river valleys, lakes, and wetlands. From its earliest days, AWA has raised awareness of the important links between land use and water resources.

In post-2013 southern Alberta flood recovery, AWA continues to be a voice for actions that work with rather than against watershed ecology. In government processes and in public outreach, we continue to emphasize better floodplain and headwaters management to improve both flood and drought resilience. We saw great potential and were active in the 'Room for the River' working groups for both the Bow-Elbow Rivers and Red Deer River watershed projects. We proposed and supported opportunities to remove vulnerable infrastructure in low density areas to create room for flood waters to dissipate. We underlined the importance of ensuring and restoring absorptive capacity in headwaters, wetlands, river-connected aquifers, and river bank vegetation. We raised concerns about risky and costly dam infrastructure on the Elbow and Red Deer Rivers. The final reports reflected our contributions and we are encouraged that 'Room for the River' concepts are now much more widely understood in southern Alberta.

AWA's *Fish and Forests* coordinating initiative from the North Saskatchewan to Oldman headwaters was active again this year (see more details in the Forests section). This year we also actively supported Calgary-based groups to successfully achieve more ecologically responsible river valley crossings for the Calgary southwest ring road.

AWA continues to coordinate much of its water work with colleagues in the Alberta Environment Network's Water Caucus. Our Alberta Water Council, regional watershed council and wetland policy work is outlined in the Government Policy section.

FORESTS

AWA continues its tireless efforts to shift the paradigm of timber-centric management of Alberta's boreal and Eastern Slopes forests. Joining forces with many other individuals and groups fighting for an ecosystem based approach to forest management has helped influence some of the decision making processes regarding Alberta's land uses. Policies need to move towards considering forests values far beyond the price of timber, especially around water and air purification, storage, and slow release; sadly this is not happening. AWA's focus this past year was influencing specific management plans for species and recreation in high value forests including species at risk management plans and sub-regional plans under the guiding provincial policy document – *the Land Use Framework*.

AWA has also supported many local communities and watershed groups strengthen their advocacy against clear cut logging and off-highway vehicle abuse. Groups in the Ghost, Bragg Creek, Crowsnest, Beaver Mines, the Castle, and more have been very active. AWA believes that there is a unifying theme to much of their efforts: a failure to manage forests for their many non-forestry values, and a lack of

meaningful public involvement in management decisions. AWA has been working to bring together some of these different initiatives to discuss common ground.

One of these AWA led collaborations began in 2012 with a *Sustainable Forests, Sustainable Communities* report and resulted in the formation of the *Fish and Forests Initiative*. Various local groups, scientists, ENGOs and other members of the public concerned about forests continue to meet several times each year to share information and to foster communication between the parties in order to help achieve mutual objectives. Its scope of concern comprises the forests in Alberta's foothills, from the US border to the Bighorn area, and the watersheds in those forests, especially the various aquatic species living in the headwaters.

To build on the *Sustainable Forests, Sustainable Communities* report and the collaboration of the Fish and Forests group, AWA hosted a Fish, Forests and Flood Resiliency Forum on June 26, 2014. The forum brought together conservation community colleagues and experts from several disciplines including biology, forestry, ecology, law, land use planning, economics, and strategic modeling to increase the profile of challenges and opportunities for the eastern Slopes. The goals of the forum were to discuss past Eastern Slopes land use decisions; the present state of Alberta's forested headwaters; and future opportunities to improve land use management. The forum was well attended, the presenters were excellent, and there was good discussion throughout the day and evening, with media coverage. Issues were raised about deforestation due to industrial activity and the poor state of our native fish populations as a signal of declining watershed quality. Community forestry was introduced as an alternative model of forestry with lower environmental impact and potential to have a pilot ecosystem-based community forest in the Crowsnest area. A communiqué was developed based on principles from the forum to use in future AWA work and discussions with decision makers.

In September 2014, AWA created an online Fish and Forests webpage as an information-gathering tool to post and share photos, reports, letters, and other results obtained from regular monitoring and issues arising in local forests. AWA hosted two *Fish and Forests* roundtables this year, both with a focus on threatened native fish populations and the habitat degradation causing their decline. AWA expanded the group to include new perspectives and groups becoming more active in their local communities. The Fish and Forests initiative remains an important one to re-focus efforts and prioritize actions around improving forest management and protecting forest values.

AWA was closely involved with the re-application by Spray Lake Sawmills (SLS) to achieve Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for sustainable forestry practices in their Forest Management Agreement (FMA) area in the Kananaskis and the Ghost-Waiparous regions. Although their original application was turned down, SLS did attain FSC conditional certification in the fall of 2013 SLS having one year to resolve sixty minor non-conformances. During that year SLS transferred from Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood Program as their FSC certifier to Bureau Veritas (BV). SLS's sixty minor non-conformances were reviewed during the transfer process from SmartWood to BV.

The BV transfer audit report stated that this was an "extremely high number of non-conformances for a Canadian forest." Yet BV closed all but one minor non-conformance. This huge discrepancy between two certifying organizations in less than a two year time period between audits, led AWA to call into question the standards of FSC certification and the certifiers. Subsequently AWA wrote to FSC Canada and the accrediting services for FSC certifiers outlining our concerns. When forestry companies wanting FSC certification, choose, hire, transfer, and are responsible for their auditors, AWA argued this represents a significant conflict of interest.

AWA expressed concerns regarding SLS's forestry operations within and outside of their FMA during the BV audit in October 2014. AWA staff and volunteers made time to take the primary auditor onto several sites of particular concern to AWA and others. These sites were prime areas for protection, and the type of management that SLS's Detailed Forest Management Plan (DFMP) goals suggest should be given special management considerations. Nonetheless, on viewing the logging, our general concerns were dismissed as being land use issues that are the purvey of the Alberta Government, not SLS. Further, all minor complaints about short culverts, non-functioning water dams and no buffers being left around springs, ephemeral creeks or wetland edges were dismissed as "unfounded" in BV audit report. Following the report, several groups including AWA raised concerns about the professionalism and credibility of BV and the auditors.

Fish and Forests partners will continue to monitor SLS's operations closely and work together to raise awareness about poor forest management practices. AWA also continues to question the FSC process and encourages them to maintain a high standard of forestry excellence in order for companies to receive certification.

GRIZZLY BEARS

Since the designation of the grizzly bear as a provincially threatened species in June 2010, AWA has worked to ensure that the new status leads to real on-the-ground changes in grizzly habitat. Without this, the designation is little more than a paper exercise. The province's 2008 Recovery Plan for grizzly bears was clear that "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." But progress on reducing this access has been slow. AWA has worked with other environmental organizations to keep awareness of grizzlies high, through a series of timely news releases on issues such as grizzly mortality and high levels of motorized access in grizzly habitat.

The 2008 Recovery Plan expired in 2013 and despite expectations that it would be renewed at the end of 2013 (or early 2014) with only minor changes, the government has instead opted to undertake a complete rewrite. Among other things, this rewrite is anticipated to bring the plan more in line, structurally, with recovery and management plans for other species at risk in Alberta. Progress has been extremely slow in this process, with a government workshop (attended by AWA and other conservation organizations) in early 2014, and written feedback opportunities. Slowness aside, the process has been relatively productive, with ESRD exhibiting a general willingness to entertain and respond to most feedback and requested changes. AWA has been led to understand that a draft of the new recovery strategy can be expected in the fall of 2015, however this process has been complicated by staff turnover and other reorganizations within Alberta Environment and Parks. In the meantime, the 2008-2013 Recovery Plan is understood to remain in effect.

The significant changes also make it difficult in some cases to tell what has changed from previous iterations of the plan. One expected, and disappointing, change, is that linear access recommendations – while enjoying a significantly expanded role in the new plan, and while having thresholds increased from 1.2km/km² to 0.85km/km² in secondary areas – will now only apply to roads instead of all open routes. AWA has protested this change.

Incorporation of access management provisions in the Land Use Framework regional plans (specifically, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP)) has also been slow, with no finalized access management framework in the SSRP anticipated before 2017.

ESRD continues to have no plans to re-introduce the grizzly bear hunt, although a worrying provision in early drafts of the new plan is for the management intent to be to only maintain existing populations (as opposed to recovering them) in parts of the province where human-grizzly interactions have been particularly contentious. There is a concern that this may manifest itself as lower required population thresholds which could be used as a justification to re-introduce a hunt in those areas.

Following significantly heightened grizzly mortality in 2013, the 2014 figures returned to roughly normal levels, with accidental deaths and illegal kills being the categories with the highest mortality numbers. Numerous grizzly bear and bear safety presentations have been given in schools, universities and libraries over the last several years.

AWA's Save the Grizzly campaign – www.savethegrizzly.ca – continues as an important focus of AWA's grizzly work, along with our satirical www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com campaign. Grizzly-related stories continue to attract high circulation in the media, with the topic being one of the largest sources of AWA's media exposure.

CARIBOU

AWA's vision is for self-sustaining Alberta woodland caribou populations; this is the same goal espoused by Alberta's Cabinet-approved woodland caribou policy and federal woodland caribou recovery strategies under the *Species at Risk Act*. However, Alberta's caribou populations continue to decline, with minimal government action to protect caribou habitat. AWA's recent work has focused on seeking strong habitat-focused Alberta caribou range plans required no later than 2017 under the federal *Species at Risk Act*.

As an environmental sector delegate, AWA participated in the Alberta government's west central (Little Smoky – A La Peche) range planning multi-sector group, until the group ceased activities in December 2014. After an industry-government group carried on without ENGO participation, we focused on public outreach. We believe our activities were instrumental in two important Alberta Energy decisions: deferring new energy lease sales planned for March 2015 in a large area of the Redrock-Prairie Creek mountain caribou range, and deferral of new energy lease sales in all Alberta caribou ranges since July 2015.

AWA engaged in national Forest Stewardship Council processes to strengthen its proposed caribou-related indicators. We also engaged with the Alberta Energy Regulator to advance cumulative effects management of the energy industry's land and water impacts for caribou (and other species) via AER's Duvernay play-based regulation pilot (see Little Smoky Area of Concern for further details). In September, AWA presented on caribou issues at an 'Inside Education' Alberta teacher workshop.

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

We have made progress towards our goal of protecting the sage-grouse and its habitat although there has been anger and frustration from some ranchers. This seems to have arisen out of the court ordered Emergency Protection Order. Despite this AWA is moving forward with a goal of demonstrating that conservation of species at risk can be a financially and culturally rewarding experience. It continues to be tumultuous and difficult but we are resolved to work our way through to this goal. Of great importance was the spring count of sage-grouse for 2015 that showed an increase in the numbers of birds in Alberta. The EPO, as despised as it is, truly is having an effect in conjunction with other on the ground actions including the removal of abandoned prairie structures and predator control by ESRD. This year, 35 males were counted in Alberta, a 150 per cent increase. 20 males were counted in Saskatchewan, a 233 per cent increase. The increases are the highest in either province for at least 20 years.

Working with one ranch family and with the financial support of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and, in particular, funds from the Cargill Foundation, we were able to complete an oral history of the ranch. The ranchers were paid to document the history as they could recollect, incorporating records from as far back as the time when the ranch was first homesteaded. The report shows how they have managed the ranch on the sage brush flats so that they have successful cattle herds and active sage-grouse leks after 100 years of ranching. From this a document is being prepared which will provide practical guidance to other ranchers on how to achieve the same results. We will seek further foundation funding to continue the work initiated.

Cliff Wallis, along with the ranchers led a small group tour of the ranch this summer. Concerns about over grazing near one watering area were expressed. It was determined that this was caused by the ranchers being one day late moving the cattle than planned. It showed clearly how closely the cattle on the sage brush plains must be managed. Later in the season, Cliff led another tour for WWF staff from Montana through the ranch property. We are continuing the conversation about the future of this important piece of Alberta's prairie and ranching heritage and ways we can work together to ensure its long-term conservation.

AWA will need to be continually mindful that our strategy is based in excellent communications and finding the best way to communicate so that it is a two way path with all those involved. That is both listening and contributing. We believe field days and opportunities to learn from each other will be key to success with the ranchers. We know beyond any doubt that if we and ranchers don't do something to change the trend of decline, the government must make it happen. Losing the sage-grouse is not an option.

Over the past couple of decades, we have had great successes working with ranchers in southwestern Alberta and other areas in southeastern Alberta but it has proven more challenging within the sage-grouse area. With the information gathered and field work in Saskatchewan, Alberta and the USA, we continue to share and communicate with other stakeholders so that we can all improve what we are doing out there. By focusing in on one area in SE Alberta as a pilot, we believe we can overcome some of the negativity towards environmental protection (and NGOs) in southeastern Alberta and accomplish real results on the ground. It is a work in progress but we remain committed to it.

The work done on this issue to date has been supported by funds from Canadian Energy Pipeline Association (CEPA), Enbridge Inc. and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as well as AWA.

BLACK BEARS

Though black bears are abundant in Alberta, AWA remains concerned that they are poorly managed in some regions, with minimal effort to prevent bear access to municipal dumps or correct poor conduct in some industrial camps. “BearSmart” guidelines are beneficial, but greater provincial government commitment, leadership and transparency are still needed. After a few years of apparent low mortality, rates of bear-human conflicts seem to have significantly increased over 2013-2015; however, black bear mortality levels are not made readily available. AWA has published two stories in the *Wild Lands Advocate* featuring folks involved in successful "BearSmart" programs as a way of increasing awareness of the important work these individuals do to reduce human bear conflicts.

WOLVES

As top predators, wolves play a valuable role in keeping wild ecosystems healthy. AWA’s goal is for the provincial government to take responsibility for managing Alberta’s wolves in a science-based, responsible and transparent manner. Despite limited data availability, we continued to track and report the extent of municipal wolf bounty claims to raise awareness about this archaic and ineffective approach to predator management. To advance collaborative non-lethal wolf management solutions, we profiled in the *Wild Lands Advocate* the successful approaches of two Alberta cattle and sheep producers to deter and prevent conflicts with wolves. AWA expressed continued concern with the west central Alberta caribou-related wolf cull: wolves continue to be scapegoats without any meaningful management of cumulative industrial disturbance in caribou habitat, which is the root cause of caribou population declines.

GAME FARMING

While AWA supports living wildlife as part of our economy, we restrict this support to economies based on maintaining wildlife populations in their natural habitats. AWA has opposed the domestication, privatization and commercialization of wildlife including on game farms since 1980 when Alberta’s Wildlife Policy was rewritten to allow game farming. In 2011 AWA vehemently opposed proposed amendments to the Livestock Industry Diversification Act (Bill 11) that would have reclassified domestic deer and elk as “diversified livestock.” AWA is of the opinion that wild game must not be treated as livestock either in practice or within legislation. Currently, in Alberta the paid killing of game farmed animals remains illegal, although it is allowed next door in Saskatchewan. Farming wildlife is a tenuous business and the number of game farms registered in Alberta dropped from around 400 in 2000 to 300 today.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD), the pervasive, unstoppable prion disease, had spread from game farms to the wild by 1996. There were 49 new cases detected in 2013 from hunter-submitted heads; 42 mule deer and 7 white tailed deer; none in moose or elk. One infected moose had been detected on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border in 2012. Results for 2014 indicate 86 new cases of CWD from animal heads submitted by hunters, 74 mule deer, 12 white tailed deer and, so far, no elk in the wild. Alberta game farms continue to struggle with CWD outbreaks including in elk.

870 elk heads were submitted for testing in 2014, hunted from progeny of those introduced to the Suffield National Wildlife Area. So far, this herd remains uninfected, although in the past two years infected deer have been detected in the nearby Cypress Hills and in the Suffield area.

CWD occurs from the Battle River in the north to the Milk River in the south, and has now been found in the Hand Hills near Drumheller and in the Bow River drainage near Lake Newell. The infection was found near Bassano in the Red Deer drainage in 2013. In 2014, it is further entrenching along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border.

Another associated health concern involves the practice of farmers storing excess grain, including wheat, in open piles on the ground until covered storage or cartage becomes available. Such piles are often available to wildlife where they can be contaminated with feces, urine and saliva. CWD could enter the human food chain via this route, although CWD has apparently never jumped the species barrier to humans. Of concern to all of us is that its cousin BSE had not jumped that barrier either, until it did, with devastating consequences.

AWA continues to call for both federal and provincial leadership in confronting CWD and in eliminating the game farming industry in the province where its costs far exceed its benefits.

FERAL HORSES

As a conservation organization, AWA is concerned with the persistence of Alberta's natural biological diversity including wildlife and natural ecosystems. Feral horses are an introduced species to Alberta. As such, they may have an adverse effect on native wildlife populations through direct competition or through altering ecosystem interactions, and they may have a negative impact on ecosystems that are sensitive to the types of disturbances caused by large herds of the horses. Globally, it is well-established that invasive introduced species are among the top five greatest threats to biological diversity. The protection of feral horses in Alberta, therefore, does not fit within our mandate of protecting Alberta's wildlife and wild places.

AWA participates in Alberta's Feral Horse Advisory committee (AFHA) in order to defend the needs of native wildlife and to promote a scientific approach to policy development. We believe a provincial feral horse policy should be developed in the context of protecting native species and natural ecosystem processes and in conjunction with an updated policy for native wildlife.

The last meeting held for the AFHA committee was in June of 2015. As part of the draft of Alberta's Feral Horse Strategy that was recently released, a summary of the field trip meeting in the Sundre Equine Management Zone (EMZ) with ESRD from June 2014 was given, as well as an update on rangeland health. Research suggests that the upper/lower foothills, west of Sundre, are most at risk from heavy grazing and range degradation, where the majority of Alberta's feral horses live.

Within the Sundre EMZ, horses prefer shrubland, grassland and cutblocks (in winter), however these habitats only make up 15% of this large area. As these grazers overlap habitat with deer, moose, elk and domestic cattle, this increases the stress on rangeland health and productivity. Assuming feral horses were the only grazers within the Sundre EMZ, their population would already be at its maximum in relation to forage capacity. Essentially, these horses take away forage from wildlife and present a significant risk to rangeland health. The Sundre EMZ is only an example of the foothills/eastern slopes

range, showing the effect of concentrated horse use in certain areas, especially in open grasslands in spring.

NATIVE TROUT

Alberta is home to several different species of native trout that have adapted to thrive in cold, clear streams and lakes of the Rocky Mountains and Foothills. Despite many of them having large historical ranges reaching all the way to the prairies, native trout populations currently occupy only a small fraction of that range in small, isolated patches. The decline of these fish in Alberta is a good indicator that our watersheds are not healthy and land uses need to be considered more carefully to ensure native trout populations persist in the future. AWA works hard to raise awareness about this connection between healthy water and abundant native trout.

AWA has taken a stand on several ongoing and potential industrial activities that could likely negatively impact native fish species. AWA strongly supported harsh penalties for Obed's coal tailings spill that occurred in October 2013 into tributaries of the Athabasca River. Provincial and federal charges are still pending. AWA opposed a proposal for a large coal mine expansion near Robb, Alberta, which has since been shelved due to economic climates and environmental concerns. We also continue to oppose a surface coal mine proposal in the Crowsnest Pass that could have severe impacts on nearby creeks home to threatened westslope cutthroat trout. (See Westslope Cutthroat Trout section)

GOVERNMENT POLICY

"It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government to save the environment." Ansel Adams

PUBLIC LANDS

Year after year, AWA works to have the government agree and act on our desperately needed publicly developed public lands policy that will deal with all aspects of public land, including access, sales, management, and conservation. No such policy exists. AWA opposes any further destruction of native prairie grassland and sales of public land until a public lands policy is developed through a transparent and democratic public process.

TAX-RECOVERY LANDS

Despite enormous public opposition to behind-closed-doors sales of public lands the Alberta government continues to dispose of public land with no opportunity for any form of public input. In June 2011, AWA, Alberta Native Plant Council and Nature Alberta collaborated to publish a document, *Sale of Public Land in Alberta: Recommendations for Improving Regulation, Policy and Procedures*.

Recommendations in the report include:

- The long-term interest of all Albertans is best served by retaining public lands as a trust held by government for conservation purposes.
- Protective notations should be applied to public lands in large blocks of prairie, Environmentally Significant Areas, and other important habitat areas for at risk species.
- Regulations are needed that clearly lay out procedures to be used for public land sale or trade and that require public notice and consultation.

The document has been distributed and provided to the government, but no response has been received.

PROTECTED AREAS - PROVINCIAL

The Land Use Framework, discussed later in this report is the formal mechanism for achieving protected areas. The process is slow and management plans to operationalize the Framework are even slower. Alberta has a long way to go to meet international protected area targets and AWA will continue to provide reasonable suggestions for protection, deferral of activities and alternative mechanisms for achieving conservation and protection.

PROTECTED AREAS - FEDERAL

Increasingly, the management focus for federal national parks is shifting away from the legislated priority of ecological integrity towards a simplistic push to get more visitor numbers through the park gates (making more visitor revenue in the process). While AWA believes that visitors are a crucial part of

national parks, the push to open up the parks to more and more inappropriate activities to boost visitor numbers is putting at risk the environmental values which make the parks so important.

Despite enormous public opposition, Parks Canada continues entertaining proposals to expand ski operations at Marmot Basin, and to establish a lodge at Maligne Lake, in the middle of important habitat for caribou and other threatened species. This latter is in defiance of the management plan for the area, which in its draft versions had included a prohibition on overnight accommodation. The broken promise of no summer use at Mt. Norquay is yet another example of the commercialization of our National Parks. The almost certain negative impacts on wildlife including Alberta's threatened grizzly bears and important wildlife corridors, are vital concerns .

Travel restrictions on Banff National Park's Bow Valley Parkway, began in 2014. In the meantime there has been a rapid expansion of commercial intensive-use activities on this stretch of road. Examples include the Banff Marathon, the *Gran Fondo* bicycle race, both being given the blessing of Parks management, with extremely limited opportunities for public consultation or feedback. This approach belies the stated intent for the closures, that being to put the interests of wildlife first on this section of highway. AWA continues to advocate for a limit to true wilderness-friendly events in the park and strenuously opposes events such as those above that commercialize our National Parks and discourage the ecological values intended for protection.

LAND-USE FRAMEWORK (LUF)

AWA has participated actively as the regional planning processes for the first three Land-Use Framework regions – the Lower Athabasca, South Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan – have developed. AWA supporters have been encouraged to participate at every opportunity of the planning process.

LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN (LARP)

AWA gave strong support again this year to the provincial government to complete major unfinished elements of the LARP. These include a Biodiversity Management Framework with science-based limits, and landscape management plans with land disturbance limits. We attended multi-stakeholder workshops, and initiated meetings with civil servants and with newly elected government decision makers to urge continued progress. Both the draft Biodiversity Management Framework and sub-regional landscape management plans did move forward this year, though their regulatory strength remains uncertain.

We also continue to engage with the government to encourage the establishment of new protected areas promised in 2012 under LARP. Although protective notations are in place, we believe formalized protection is important, as are official, transparent management plans to ensure the parks fulfill their ecological objectives.

SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (SSRP)

The final version of the SSRP was released on July 23, 2014. In some regards it was an improvement on the draft plan but AWA saw it as a missed opportunity. The SSRP created a new Heritage Rangeland, three new Wildland Provincial Parks and expanded other protected areas along the Eastern Slopes. The

boundaries of these new and expanded parks have in some cases excluded critical valleys supporting unusual plant and animal diversity. Consequently the connectivity and landscape-level protection that many species need to survive. The Milk River and Wild Horse Plains areas appear on a map for priority sub-regional planning which is hopeful but no new designated conservation areas were established in any grassland areas.

AWA focus this year was to provide input on many of the key conservation pieces of the SSRP still to be completed including the Regional Trails System Plan, Linear Footprint Management Plan, Biodiversity Management Framework, and Recreation Access Management Plans. AWA believes the south Saskatchewan region desperately needs limits on human access and industrial development now.

AWA participated in meetings with the Land Use Secretariat staff about our concerns with the lack of designated protected areas in the SSRP, particularly in the Castle wilderness. Government staff wanted to use public land use zones as an alternative way to protect the portion of the Castle area not designated as a Wildland or Provincial Park. AWA strongly opposed, pointing to other public land use zones in the province which allow rampant off-highway vehicle use and other destructive activities on the landscape.

AWA also participated in government led workshops on the development of the Biodiversity Management Framework (BMF) for the South Saskatchewan region and the Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan, both of which are still under development. AWA encouraged the completion of the BMF while cautioning that using current biodiversity levels as a baseline ignores much of biodiversity already lost throughout the region. AWA joined a coalition of landowners, ranchers, ENGOs and individuals with an interest in preserving the biological and low impact recreational values of the Porcupine Hills. The purpose of the coalition was to provide input to government staff working on the recreation plans so they consider all ecological values of the area not just the motorized recreation opportunities it could provide. The coalition continues to work together and remains in an ongoing dialogue with government planners.

AWA remains highly supportive of the ideals and principles behind the Land-Use Framework process. However we continue to have grave concerns about the feedback from the consultation processes seeming to bear little weight on the final outcomes and the lack of progress the Government of Alberta has shown in protecting environmentally significant areas and resolving land use conflicts in the two completed regional plans.

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (NSRP)

2014 saw the start of the third regional plan under the government's Land-Use Framework: the NSRP. Unlike the two previous regional plans (the LARP and SSRP), the NSRP started out with an escalated development process, although this was hampered by competing priorities within the provincial legislature and the election of the new Alberta government in May 2015. Consequently, little progress has been seen so far. A terms-of-reference document and public workbook were released in 2014, with Phase I public and stakeholder consultation sessions being held and a Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) being convened and subsequently an advice document drafted. This document is awaiting ratification by caucus before it can be released to the public and the NSRP process can continue. It is hoped that this can occur early in fall 2015 and a draft version of the plan released within the year.

AWA has been actively involved, with AWA staff, board members and/or volunteers attending more than half the Phase I consultation sessions. AWA has had discussions with the ADM for Parks and Protected areas, the Senior Parks Planner and members of the NSRAC. In addition it has made official submissions to the land use secretariat that highlight conservation priorities for the region and makes a strong case for the Bighorn to be designated a Wildland Provincial Park. In addition to being included in AWA's official submission, this document has been circulated to NSRAC members and to AEP officers and staff, as well as the conservation community at large.

Among other priorities, key messages in AWA's NSRP submission include:

- Conservation Priorities: The need to protect wild spaces, including AWA identified areas of concern such as the Bighorn, Parkland Dunes, Bodo Hills, and the North Saskatchewan River valley;
- Protected Areas and Headwater Security: The need to maintain or improve designation of existing protected areas within the NSR, especially with an eye to maintaining the security of our headwaters;
- Linear Footprint Density: The need to incorporate existing science into specific thresholds and recommendations for linear access;
- Sustainable Forestry: The need to dedicate North Saskatchewan headwaters forests for the security of our water;
- Coal: The need to maintain or enhance the intent and environmental focus of the 1976 Alberta Coal Policy;
- Biodiversity: The need to recover species at risk and ensure healthy forests and watersheds, and an increase in biodiversity;
- Species at Risk: The need to ensure the survival of species at risk living in the NSR, including grizzly bears, bull trout and harlequin ducks;
- Motorized Off Road Recreation: The need to develop a trail network that is properly designed and sustainable, including the closure and removal of trails in sensitive backcountry areas.

AWA's NSRP submission is also made available on AWA's purpose-built website for the North Saskatchewan and NSRP related concerns, found at <http://abwild.ca/water>.

This website is a key component of AWA's Freshwater Campaign, a campaign built around engaging recreationalists and current users of the North Saskatchewan headwaters areas. The campaign and the website provide tools for members of this constituency to become involved in the NSRP, and provide avenues for them to speak out in their own voice about why protection of the Bighorn and other areas in the North Saskatchewan is important to them. The website acts as a resource repository with data, reports, maps and other documents related to the North Saskatchewan, along with letter writing tools and other pages. A primary component is an online map of the region that invites users to post their own stories and photos of the headwaters, which get placed on the map for other users to view.

The Freshwater Campaign is being undertaken with the support of Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) as a component of their national "Homewaters" campaign. MEC members and customers who are interested in the protection of freshwater sources in the Rocky Mountain eastern slopes are encouraged to get in touch with AWA and to sign up with our Freshwater Campaign. The two trail monitoring trips undertaken by AWA into the Bighorn in the summer of 2015 both included volunteers recruited as a part of the Freshwater Campaign.

FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING REGIONS

The North Saskatchewan Region is the latest for which work on a regional plan has begun. However the planning processes for regions are anticipated to begin soon, starting with the Upper Peace Regional Plan (UPRP) and Upper Athabasca Regional Plan (UARP) within the next year.

In anticipation of the start of these future regions' planning processes, AWA is collaborating with other ENGOs and academics under the title of the *Northern Alberta Conservation Areas Working Group*. The goal of this working group is to draft a set of science-based maps and proposals for the layout of future conservation areas, to feed into the future planning processes for those LUF regions. It is also expected that working group proposals will form the core of a suite of public documents, usable as education and communication tools related to wild species and wilderness conservation in northern and boreal areas of the province.

WETLAND POLICY

AWA continues to champion a clear “no net loss” provincial wetland policy that a strong majority of Albertans supported in extensive public consultations in 2007. We continue to engage with the provincial government on the best opportunities to strengthen the new wetland policy, which sets no clear regional or provincial outcomes. In June 2015, the new provincial wetland policy came into effect for Alberta’s settled areas (White Zone). The policy’s offset framework is based on a complex functional assessment approach which AWA believes will unfortunately facilitate ongoing wetland destruction.

Meanwhile, there is still no effective wetland protection for Alberta’s public lands (Green Zone), which include extensive and vital wetlands in the boreal forest, foothills, and eastern slopes regions. Peat wetlands are essential to store and purify water, and provide drought and fire resilience to adjacent forests. AWA gave strong support again this year to the provincial government to complete major unfinished elements of the Lower Athabasca regional plan, which could greatly benefit peatland management. We have encouraged completion of a Biodiversity Management Framework with meaningful wetland intactness indicators, and landscape management plans with meaningful land disturbance limits. While progress is slow and their regulatory strength remains uncertain, a draft LARP Biodiversity Management Framework and sub-regional landscape management plans did move forward this year.

Since 2013, AWA has participated in the federal-provincial joint oil sands monitoring program (JOSM) as an environmental delegate to the Biodiversity component advisory committee. One focus of our Biodiversity committee work was to accelerate action on a promised oil sands wetlands monitoring program. The development of that program became the responsibility of the Biodiversity component this year; it remains undeveloped three years after JOSM’s inception, but a work plan is finally being executed.

This year, AWA presented to the Canadian Bar Association in Calgary on provincial wetland policy issues. We also presented on the threats to peat wetlands from oil sands mining and in situ impacts at a provincial water conference.

WATER FOR LIFE

Alberta’s 2003 ‘Water for Life’ strategy has three goals: safe, secure drinking water supply; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. AWA works to advance in particular the ‘healthy aquatic ecosystems’ goal, which has made less progress than the other Water for Life goals. Since November 2007, AWA has been an Environmental Sector Board member of the multi-sector Alberta Water Council, which advises the provincial government on Water for Life implementation. In the past year we supported the work of the Aquatic Invasive, Water Literacy and Lake Management teams. We continued to support enhanced tracking of the implementation of Council recommendations.

AWA is a member of most Alberta regional Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs). In May 2015, AWA’s Carolyn Campbell was elected to a two-year term as a Board member of the Athabasca Watershed Council, representing the Stewardship sector. Our participation on this Board will assist the

Athabasca Watershed Council in its mandate of integrated watershed management planning, and support its vision and mission to achieve an ecologically healthy watershed. This year we continued to support the implementation of the Oldman Watershed Council's Headwaters Action Plan, and participated in Bow River Basin Council forums and workshops. AWA attended the WPAC summit in autumn 2014 in Edmonton. We also support grassroots Watershed Stewardship Groups, including Ghost area groups seeking more responsible logging practices.

ROOM FOR THE RIVER

In the past year AWA had an opportunity to attend discussions and provide comment on WaterSmart's pilot projects in the Bow River and the Red Deer River called "Room for the River". These projects provide recommendations for flood mitigation derived from a Dutch strategy that in general relies on principles focusing on moving new manmade structures back from rivers and allowing them to flow naturally. AWA has also been supporting Calgary River Valley's and Weaselhead/Glenmore Park Preservation Society's efforts to ensure that all environmental concerns were addressed in regards to the realignment of the Elbow River and bridge spanning the Elbow River valley for the Southwest Calgary Ringroad. These efforts saw the lengthening of the bridge, requiring less berming and increasing the width for the wildlife corridor as well as reduced armouring of the river.

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Biodiversity includes a diversity of ecosystems, species and genetic diversity within species. Since 1990, Alberta has repeatedly made national and international commitments to maintain and restore its biodiversity, yet Alberta's biodiversity intactness continues to decline.

More than five years ago, the Alberta government committed to have a Biodiversity Policy in place to help Land Use Framework regional plans manage cumulative impacts to air, land, water and biodiversity. Since then, AWA has consistently encouraged delivery on that promise. In late 2014, we were encouraged that a draft biodiversity policy was finally circulated publicly for comment, even though it was weak. In our feedback, AWA has asked for a clear policy intent to 'maintain biodiversity', consistent with Alberta's prior commitments. We also requested a pro-active approach in the policy: if thresholds will foreseeably be approached or crossed by development proposals, regulatory actions should occur to prevent biodiversity loss, since restoration of many of Alberta's key ecosystems is difficult or impossible.

SPECIES AT RISK

Protecting remaining large wildland habitats so that biodiversity, including species at risk, and non-industrial landscapes may survive is core to AWA's day-to-day work. Species at risk are the canary in the coal mine with regard to our relationship with the earth. Be they butterflies, snails or the more visible grizzly bear or woodland caribou, their loss is a direct example of society's failure to manage the environment in a sustainable, renewable way.

Species at risk do not receive adequate protection under the law in most cases in Alberta. It is concerning that the direction of recent federal decisions is towards only protecting species on federal

lands that are not at the so-called 'periphery' of their range, while provincial legislation only sets up optional recovery plans without legal obligations to protect habitat.

AWA has begun work with EcoJustice and other partners to encourage an Alberta law reform starting with the provincial *Wildlife Act*. AWA believes Alberta's *Wildlife Act* is very outdated, hunting focused, and based on resource conservation. The core element of species and habitat protection is missing from the *Wildlife Act* which is why AWA advocates for a stand-alone endangered species legislation.

FEDERAL SPECIES AT RISK ACT (SARA)

Effective application of the 2002 federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) to bring about more habitat protection is needed. Species at risk listings usually occur several years after the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recommends a certain species is at some level of risk of extirpation. Recovery strategies, protection orders, and action plans for the majority of species listed under SARA are either issued well past legislated deadlines or not at all. AWA and partner conservation groups are at constant vigil and have found it necessary to turn to legal action in order to have SARA invoked.

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

Canada's endangered Greater Sage-grouse populations rebounded this year. AWA is cautiously optimistic about the increased numbers. Credited with the increase are climatic factors and, as an outcome of the federal Emergency Protection Order, increased attention to remedying this majestic bird's plight as a result of AWA's and others constant pressure and related court action. In 2014, there were thought to be only 14 males remaining in Alberta, with the total provincial population estimated at approximately 30 birds. Only six males were counted at active breeding grounds or 'leks' in Saskatchewan.

This year, 35 males were counted in Alberta, saw a 150 per cent increase over 2014. 20 males were counted in Saskatchewan, a 233 per cent increase. This is the highest growth rate in either province for at least 20 years. AWA believes this is a strong endorsement for federal intervention under the Species at Risk Act where provincial inaction and poor provincial endangered species laws allow endangered wildlife to reach a crisis. The Emergency Protection Order is doing what it should, protecting sage-grouse habitat from more industrialization and promoting more on-the-ground action to restore damaged lands.

The failure of provincial laws to protect sage-grouse habitat in the face of rapid oil and gas development was a leading factor in the prairie bird's dramatic population drop: Between 1988 and 2006, nearly 90 per cent of Canada's sage-grouse died off. Canada's sage-grouse populations face a long road to full recovery, but these numbers are heartening. The population will require continued protection and active management by the provincial government to build numbers to safe levels.

The emergency order was announced in December of 2013, after a lengthy court battle that saw AWA, Wilderness Committee, Nature Saskatchewan and Grasslands Naturalists - represented by Ecojustice lawyers - challenge the federal government to step up protections for the sage-grouse.

Just a few years ago, in the absence of any meaningful protection from the provincial and the federal governments, it seemed inevitable that these birds would go extinct in Canada but now, we have reason

to hope. With the cooperation of all parties, including landowners working to protect the sage-grouse, our hope is that populations will continue to grow.

AWA is represented by Ecojustice to participate in the legal action the city of Medicine Hat and LGX Oil have filed against the Emergency Protection Order. The process has stalled at this time.

WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT

Westslope cutthroat trout has been a high priority in the last year for AWA conservation efforts. Over the span of several years, AWA was represented on the joint federal-provincial recovery team for westslope cutthroat trout. The Government of Alberta approved a recovery plan for the species in March 2013, around the same time as Alberta populations of Westslope cutthroat trout were finally designated as **threatened** under the SARA. This came seven years after Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) called for the threatened designation. The designation was made because native populations of this fish have been “drastically reduced, by almost 80%, due to over-exploitation, habitat degradation and hybridization/competition with non-native trout.” The Alberta recovery plan became part of a proposed federal recovery strategy released in December 2013. AWA consulted with several fish and SARA law experts to submit informed comments on this proposed recovery strategy. AWA stressed in our comments the need to expand on the proposed critical habitat designation of “bankfull waterbodies where pure strain westslope cutthroat trout exist” to include riparian vegetation zones surrounding the waterbodies as well as other elements that were missing from the limited definition of critical habitat. The final federal recovery strategy was released at the end of March 2014 with few changes from the proposed strategy.

AWA sent a demand letter to the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans informing them of what AWA considered unlawful aspects of the recovery strategy. AWA believed the recovery strategy had failed to adequately identify critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout. In response to our demand letter, Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) staff met with AWA representatives in November 2014 to discuss our concerns. We were informed by DFO staff during the meeting that a critical habitat order had not been issued for cutthroat trout, which is necessary to legally protect its critical habitat. The Minister is legally required under the SARA to issue the order within 180 days after the final recovery strategy was published on the Public Registry. The 180-day statutory deadline expired on September 24, 2014.

AWA took many subsequent steps requesting information and updates on recovery progress, and urging the federal minister to issue the critical habitat order, as a critical first step in the species recovery, with no avail. This lack of response led AWA to team up with another ENGO to take legal action against the Minister. AWA continues to work with a lawyer in an effort to force the Minister to issue the critical habitat order for westslope cutthroat trout.

WOOD AND PLAINS BISON

American bison are a keystone species to the prairie ecosystem, but due to a number of limiting factors including habitat fragmentation, policy, and disease, they are in dire need of recovery in Alberta. AWA's main concern is that wild bison herds remain wild and they be managed as such. We define 'wild' as bison that have not been subject to gene introgression through hybridization with cattle. This year, three main issues have arisen that we have gathered into a position statement.

COSEWIC has recommended that wood bison be downlisted under the SARA to 'special concern' from 'threatened', however, in Alberta disease is prevalent in the Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) herd. Under the *Alberta Wildlife Act* diseased bison are not considered wildlife, therefore bison that roam out of the park are eligible to be hunted. As the WBNP park subpopulation makes up the majority of the Canadian wood bison population, we are against the downlisting of wood bison until they are once again considered wildlife.

Plains bison are considered livestock in Alberta. This creates conflict in terms of managing the 'extirpated' wild plains bison versus the domestically raised plains bison. This year, the subspecies has come up for listing under SARA by COSEWIC to 'endangered'. AWA believes that Alberta should adopt a strategy to differentiate the status for wild bison and domestic bison based on ownership. Their status would depend on whether they are located on a commercial farm, a private conservation herd or in the wild. This way, wild bison would get the protection that they desperately need to begin recovery in the wilderness.

Banff National Park has initiated their plan to re-introduce plains bison into the park. AWA supports the re-introduction of native species, and looks forward to seeing free roaming bison in the park, however there are a number of outstanding concerns related to the reintroduction that AWA would like to see resolved.

- Minimal use of appropriate fencing, allowing connectivity with other wildlife population connectivity and the free roaming of the reintroduced bison. AWA does not support penned bison paddocks such as those used historically in BNP.
- National Parks staff must develop a strong relationship with ranchers on the eastern slopes as well as provincial AEP staff to effectively manage bison roaming outside of the park; the spread of disease from cattle; and the possibility of inter-breeding with domestic cattle.
- A plan for dealing with escaped bison that leave BNP must be formalized.
- Roads and other incursions into the wild natural areas planned for bison reintroduction must not be upgraded for access that would provide tourist attractants and further commercialization of BNP.

LIMBER AND WHITEBARK PINE

Whitebark pine has been proposed for addition to the federal Species at Risk list, and AWA has also worked towards having limber pine receive the same status. A provincial recovery team has been established for both species, and AWA continues to monitor progress. An Alberta Whitebark Pine Recovery Plan 2013-2018 was released in 2014 and an Alberta Limber Pine Recovery Plan 2014 - 2019 was released in the fall of 2014.

OTHER SPECIES AT RISK

AWA continues to monitor and provide input to the progress of recovery processes for other wildlife, including proposed additions to the federal Species at Risk Act, including bank swallow and Gibson's Big Sand Tiger Beetle. When the opportunity arises, AWA provides comments on proposed documents open for public consultation by SARA.

AWA opposed renewed proposals to introduce a hunting season for sandhill cranes (listed as "sensitive" in Alberta). We noted that sandhill crane continued to be vulnerable, there are lingering doubts about population estimates and there is a persistent risk of "accidental" kill of endangered whooping cranes.

In April 2014, AWA wrote to the provincial Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, requesting the immediate removal of all nine of Alberta's native bat species from the Non-Licence Animal List. AWA pointed out that hibernating and migratory bat species are facing imminent risk of significantly reduced populations from disease and wind turbine deaths, respectively, and require formal protection instead of being considered "pests." August 2014 AWA supported adding the endangered little brown myotis, northern myotis, and tri-coloured bat to Schedule 1 under SARA as an emergency measure to protect the three species from White-Nose Syndrome. As a result of the emergency assessment, the bats were added later in the year. However, the little brown myotis remains on Alberta's Pest List.

AWA also gave comments on the proposed Recovery Strategy for the greater short-horned lizard. Our suggestions included increasing the area of occupancy, and the need for more protected habitat for the species. Our concerns with the strategy included a lack of clear proposed actions to help the greater short-horned lizard recover and underplaying the threat of oil and gas activity.

In November 2013, AWA wrote to the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, calling for the suspension of all applications of neonicotinoids insecticides until a thorough independent review is completed of their effects on terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates, birds and mammals.

More recently, AWA provided comments to support the listing of the Saskatchewan-Nelson rivers bull trout species under SARA as 'threatened', due to severe declines in numbers/range and the complete loss of some populations due to cumulative impacts on their habitat and historical fishing pressures.

AWA also provided comments supporting the proposed management plan for the peregrine falcon. The objective of the plan is to have a stable population within 10 years. AWA believes peregrine falcons are recovering well in Alberta and will continue to with the downward trend in contaminant levels.

PROTECTED AREAS PROGRESS

ALBERTA'S PROVINCIALLY PROTECTED AREAS

Alberta's protected areas network includes six federally-protected National Parks (Banff, Jasper, Waterton, Wood Buffalo and Elk Island) as well as a series of provincially-protected areas. The Government of Alberta's *Alberta Land Reference Manual* provides data on number and area of provincially protected areas. (www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/library/land-reference-manual.aspx)

Almost all of the changes since 2013 in the table below are due to new protected areas created through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan. (It should be noted those new protected areas do not yet appear on the website listed above, although their sizes can be calculated from maps posted to the Land Use Framework website at landuse.alberta.ca/ResultsResources/Pages/MapsandShapefiles.aspx.)

New protected areas created through the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan do not yet appear in the data set as they are still pending approval; it is hoped that they will appear in the 2015 table.

During 2015 a significant donation from an individual led to the creation of Antelope Hill Provincial Park. The park is designated and protected but not open to the public until such time as the owner leaves his home on the property. As we look forward to 2016, we are optimistic the new provincial government will keep a promise to protect the Castle Wilderness.

Name	Number		Acres		Hectares	
	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	1	1,135,872.00	1,135,872.00	459,671.04	459,671.04
Ecological Reserves	15	15	66,329.29	66,329.29	26,843.34	26,843.34
Wilderness Areas	3	3	249,548.80	249,548.80	100,988.79	100,988.79
Wildland Parks	39	36	7,469,691.82	7,217,943.50	3,022,877.03	2,921,009.77
Heritage Rangelands	3	2	114,574.88	29,677.84	46,366.81	12,010.47
Provincial Parks	76	75	559,568.33	566,151.00	226,449.27	225,066.37
Natural Areas	139	139	321,090.99	321,090.99	129,943.98	129,943.98
Provincial Recreation Areas	217	215	330,009.51	329,691.71	133,550.11	133,421.50
T O T A L	493	486	10,246,685.62	9,916,305.13	4,146,690.37	4,008,955.26

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

COMMISSION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) is an international organization created by Canada, Mexico and the United States to address regional environmental concerns, help prevent potential trade and environmental conflicts, and to promote the effective enforcement of environmental law. AWA continues to emphasize the important role that the CEC Secretariat can play in facilitating activities related to capacity building and information sharing. AWA looks forward to continuing to advance grassland biodiversity conservation at the continental level with renewed and always valuable efforts from the CEC.

TEMPERATE GRASSLAND CONSERVATION

In an effort to increase the rate of progress in conserving and protecting temperate grasslands, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas created the Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force, now a Specialist Group, in 1996. This Specialist Group launched the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative (TGCI) in June 2008 at an International Grasslands Congress workshop in Hohhot, China in which the AWA participated. The TGCI has described the state of the world's temperate grasslands and has supported various temperate grassland conservation initiatives. The mission of the TGCI is "To reverse the trend of biodiversity loss and degradation of temperate grasslands by promoting both the designation and special management of representative protected areas and the widespread use of sustainable management practices beyond protected area boundaries, with the goal of at least doubling the current level of protection by 2014." This work continues to build on various international programs as well as the Hohhot Declaration of 2008 which states: "...temperate grasslands are critically endangered and urgent action is required to protect and maintain the many valuable ecological services they provide." The TGCI hopes to assist grassland conservation by educating and influencing decision-makers responsible for temperate grassland management and protection. In North America, the TGCI is working on revitalizing the Northern Plains Conservation Network as well as supporting the work of the Crossing the Medicine Line Network. AWA continues to receive materials and participate in TGCI discussions on an ad hoc basis.

TWINNING OF TWO SIGNIFICANT INTERNATIONAL RAMSAR SITES

The international cooperation that has been achieved through the twinning of Hay-Zama Lakes in Alberta and Dalai Lake Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia is valued and the friendships created from the will to defend natural places are significant. It has resulted in increased resources and protection for each of these two sites involved in this international partnership. Lack of staffing in Hay-Zama Wildland Park has made it difficult for Alberta to maintain its agreement for support of the Dalai Lakes staff and AWA continues to press for improvement in staffing levels.

NORTHERN PLAINS CONSERVATION NETWORK

In 2015 AWA attended the Northern Plains Conservation Network's biannual meeting in Douglas, Wyoming. It was an excellent opportunity to meet colleagues AWA has been working with for more than

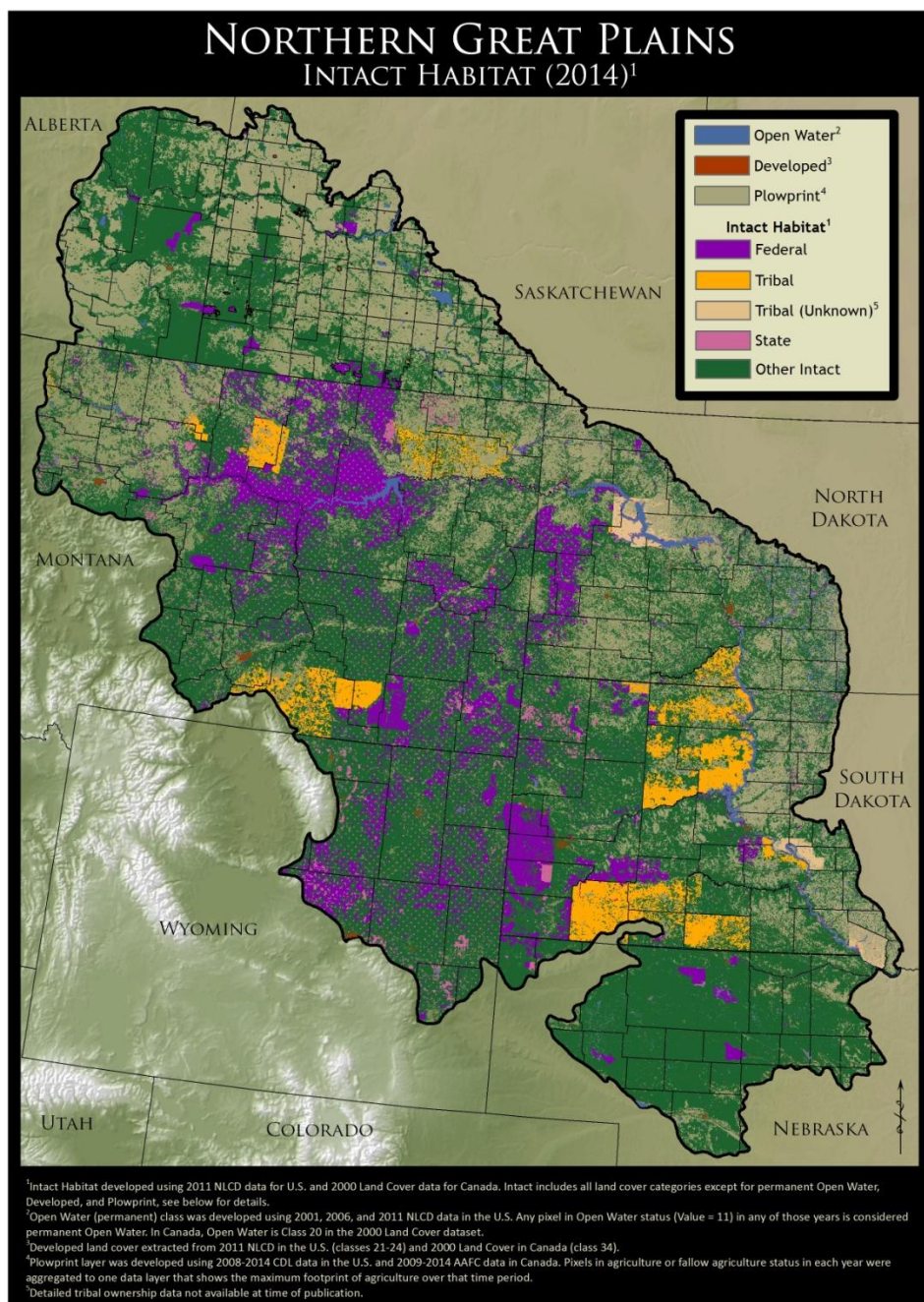
10 years to create a "sea of grass" in the northern plains. It was in 2004, when AWA hosted the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Calgary, that the vision for a "sea of grass" was launched and AWA joined the team that is the NPCN. AWA's Cliff Wallis has represented AWA in this network from its inception. Jonathan Proctor (*Defenders of Wildlife*) came to Calgary for the press conference and recounts how amazed he was at the media coverage and interest the launch received. Calgary was the perfect location for the launch since at the time the Network decided conditions weren't favourable enough yet to launch this vision in the United States.

At 424 million acres, the Great Plains is likely the largest grassland ecosystem in North America and one of the largest in the world. The vision is to establish a sea of grass to support healthy wildlife populations and vibrant communities of people. NPCN believes that broad-scale restoration of this landscape will affirm that our society both recognizes this necessity and is progressive enough to implement this vision.

Eleven years later, the network is stronger. Many of the founders are still here and acre by acre the conservation footprint on these high plains is growing. This network knows no political boundaries and works for greater understanding of the need to restore prairie grasslands and for on the ground habitat restoration results. For example, the American Prairie Reserve, formed as a result of the vision, acquires land to help the vision become reality.

This year's meetings provided opportunities to meet and greet, tell stories, and share successes, triumphs and

difficulties. Bison are being reintroduced, prairie dog colonies are growing, and greater sage-grouse prospects are brightening due to actions such as no burning and selective burning in grouse habitat. It was a chance to regenerate enthusiasm, and to know the value of the hard conservation work we do.



NPCN members currently contribute to two main focii – a Bison and Grassland Bird Initiative. The bison initiative is moving forward and supporting efforts to place the bison on the tri-lateral conservation table made up of Canada, Mexico, and U.S. There are many ways countries can cooperate. Grasslands National Park could sustain 1,000 bison, and fencing of the entire west unit would mean they could sustain more than 1,000. The Grassland Bird Initiative is focused on best management practices. Sage-grouse continue to be one of the issues at the forefront as the US decision to list or not is looming. Onefour Research Station lands in Canada were brought up to underline that there has been no consultation with the conservation community about this imminent change in government ownership of these lands. The transition may mean there is simply no more research and the area could become part of an existing grazing cooperative for cattle. This would be tragic and unacceptable.



Jose Quiroz and Brittany Verbeek on AWA field tour to Star Creek – Christyann Olson

STRENGTH AND CAPACITY

Our members are the force and means of the Alberta Wilderness Association. We continue to evaluate operations, develop capacity, and reorganize based on strategic directions. AWA displays leadership capacity by reinvigorating its organization, developing staff skill, and renewing efforts with strategies and tactics to meet our mission. AWA is determined to continue to play a leadership role, build community partnerships, and focus on our grassroots connections. Our members and supporters are of utmost importance. Our members and supporters throughout the province and around the World are our eyes on wilderness areas in their regions. We depend on local contacts informing AWA staff of potential or active threats to Alberta's wild places and providing us with local information that may otherwise be inaccessible to us. There is no more important role for AWA than to ensure that our members and the public at large are informed on wilderness issues in a way that motivates people and leads to positive action to defend wild lands and wildlife.

Volunteers are crucial to our success. Volunteers help with on the ground protection of wilderness, office assistance, office building and garden maintenance, and organization of and participation in events such as talks and hikes, benefit concerts, casino fundraising, the Climb and Run for Wilderness, and the Wild West Gala.

WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

The Wild Lands Advocate (WLA) is AWA's news journal; it provides information and perspectives on Alberta's wilderness that will facilitate conservation through awareness and action. It is a crucial tool helping inform public debate in Alberta.

The journal reports news and information about the work of AWA and its supporters. It tells the stories of Wild Alberta, and the people involved, through investigation and personal accounts. It provides timely, accurate, interesting, and useful information to AWA supporters and the general public by using news, stories, and perspectives on issues pertaining to Alberta's wilderness and AWA's work. AWA staff takes ownership and leadership for articles in the WLA, and a team effort has increased its readability and relevance. The WLA is published in full colour six times annually. The editor of the WLA is Ian Urquhart.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS RESOURCE CENTRE

Wilderness Resource Centre archiving and cataloguing continued to move forward this year. Specifically a paper archive of critical administrative records has been digitized with paper records sealed and stored. The bar code inventory system had a second pass completing the work of bar coding all bound publications. Our on-line catalogue database is partially developed, and continued development and growth of the Electronic Wilderness Resource Centre (EWRC), so that we have top of the line technology and storage capacity, is in place. We are routinely filing in the EWRC, building our collection and the historical records of wilderness in Alberta. We have also instituted routine external back up of the EWRC. Paper filing is minimal as we have made a significant transition to electronic filing and storage.

The electronic system facilitates ease of sharing and secure storage. The library is maintained by our volunteer librarian Linda Javeri.

ONLINE PRESENCE

Following AWA's 2014 move to have the hosting of its major information website and resource website relocated from the United States to Canada, we have continued to monitor and evaluate the new site's usability and usage. While the transition went well and the new software platform is working, various interface issues have been identified, and AWA is contracting the services of Build Studio, a professional web development company with usability expertise, to revamp the public interface. This revamp is expected to be completed in the fall of 2015 and AWA is optimistic about the outcome. Overall, we are more comfortable with our Canadian host and the technology that is in place. We have made good progress in maintaining content on the sites and believe these websites are key to our outreach work. We have a first rate electronic newsletter service that has eliminated difficulty in delivering important messages to members, supporters and those who have self-selected to be on the lists. Changes to laws regarding the use of electronic newsletters in Canada, came into effect this year. In 2014 AWA responded to Canadian Anti Spam Legislation and renewed its list of subscribers keeping abreast of the new law and regulations. An initial drop in the number of subscribers following this move is being quickly recovered with new subscribers who recognize the value in this facet of AWA's communications. We have received recognition from colleagues and others for our ability to get the news out quickly to a broad audience.

AWA has three primary websites:

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca (major information and resource site)

www.ClimbforWilderness.ca (Earth Day event site)

www.GoWildAlberta.ca (online purchasing and donation site)

and five single issue websites:

www.SavetheGrizzlies.ca

www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com

www.abwild.ca/forests

www.abwild.ca/water

www.abwild.ca/coal

The three main list serve newsletters are:

General AWA News and Events (1310 addresses on this list)

Media News (95 outlets on this list)

Wilderness & Wildlife Defenders (folks who will take action, write letters, respond to issues; 613 on this list)

We also have lists that are specific to various campaigns and events:

Climb for Wilderness (1015 addresses across three related lists)

Wild West Gala (395 addresses)

Sage-grouse Partnership list, Fish and Forests list, etc.

AWA maintains a social media presence, with one Facebook page (user AlbertaWilderness), one Google+ profile, one Instagram profile (AlbertaWildernessAssociation) and two primary Twitter accounts (@ABWilderness and @Climb4Wild) in addition to various Twitter accounts maintained by individual staff members.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE DEFENDERS

AWA's Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Defenders program continues to give people the opportunity to have an active voice in some of the decisions being made that affect Alberta's wilderness and wildlife. More than 600 participants are contacted through AWA's online listserv. Throughout the 2014-2015 year, seven alerts were sent out on a variety of issues ranging from logging in Star Creek to protected area designations on the grasslands to stopping energy leasing in caribou ranges and ski resort expansions at Lake Louise. AWA regularly receives many copies of letters and emails sent by participants as part of this program.

HIKES, TALKS, FILMS AND TOURS OUTREACH PROGRAM

The summer hike season went as planned except one hike cancelled in the Cardinal Divide due to lack of registrations. We organized seven hikes, one snowshoeing trip and one bus tour introducing a total of 113 participants into five of Alberta's six natural regions. These numbers point to a strong program that continues to meet with success in its goal of introducing the public to the natural beauty of these wilderness areas, and helping fulfill the awareness aspect of AWA's mission. The hikes program is an important part of the outreach program as a means for keeping in contact with the local community that lives in and around AWA's areas of concern and increasing interest in areas less well known to hikers and engaging them about AWA's conservation work. The spring and fall Whaleback trips are especially inspiring for people to learn about a successful conservation campaign and the resulting protected area. All of our outdoor programs are meant to emphasize the benefit of a healthy lifestyle and the benefits of a healthy environment for the people and the wildlife that depend on it.

The Tuesday Talks program in Calgary continues to draw a good audience with excellent presentations by volunteer presenters. Nine talks, including a book signing and film screening, held at AWA's Hillhurst building with more than 400 individuals attending created an opportunity to learn more about AWA's work and discuss a broad range of environmental topics throughout the province.

With the generous support of the Wildbird General Store and Jackson Power, AWA hosted six Thursday Talks in Edmonton as part of our first annual Wilderness around the World Speaker Series. It was a solid opportunity to broaden our member base and discuss wilderness topics from different countries around the world, comparing and contrasting conservation successes and issues in our own province. The success in its inaugural year was encouraging as we have had difficulties engaging a consistent crowd in the Edmonton region. AWA will offer the program for a second year.

AWA participated in a wide variety of festivals and events with a display table which is an important part of achieving our goal of outreach and education about wilderness in Alberta. It gives AWA staff and volunteers an opportunity to meet Albertans of all ages and share our work with them as well as hear their thoughts and experiences relating to Wild Alberta.

MUSIC FOR THE WILD

The seventh year of the Music for the Wild program continued, under consistent volunteer coordination by George Campbell, to attract a segment of the population that does not often get wide exposure to AWA's outreach and messaging. Music for the Wild events during the 2014-2015 season were very successful and each one sold out. They offer an excellent venue for spreading conservation awareness. Five music nights were attended by more than 350 people. This AWA tradition will no doubt continue for many years to come.

SUMMER WILDERNESS DEFENDERS KIDS' CAMP

AWA's Wilderness Defenders Kids Camp program was a tremendous success this year, educating and instilling a love of grasslands into a great group of youngsters! The day camp provided an excellent opportunity for children living in an urban area to explore several natural areas and gain an appreciation of the natural world in a fun, hands-on way. Throughout both weeks we covered a variety of topics related to grassland ecosystems including the role and types of pollinators; wetland composition and functions; sights, sounds, and traces of prairie flora and fauna; and grassland predator-prey relationships.

Field trips to Nose Hill Park and Big Hill Springs Provincial Park allowed the children to experience firsthand the complexities and beauty of natural landscapes and to share these experiences with their peers. They helped spot and learnt the names and fun facts about creeping white and golden aster, gumweed, Swainson's hawks, Savannah sparrows, trembling aspen, and many more. They learnt the difference between native and non-native species and how humans have impacted native prairies. The children essentially became 'grassland groupies' by building bee hotels, identifying plants and animals on our nature walks, playing wildlife habitat games, and catching and examining aquatic insects and amphibians. Their knowledge was further enhanced by volunteers Gus Yaki, naturalist and Dave Mayhood, aquatic specialist, who provided expert knowledge of interactions between plant and animal species living in all sorts of grassland habitats. The children were able to walk to most activities and spent most days outside, being active and learning about being healthy, active and aware of a healthy environment.

Each child prepared a project on grassland conservation issues and presented what they had researched and learnt to their parents and AWA staff at the end of the week. They were eager to share their conservation messages to others at their schools and in their community.

EARTH DAY - CLIMB AND RUN FOR WILDERNESS AND THE WILD ALBERTA EXPO

AWA's Annual Earth Day event at the Calgary Tower was on April 18th, 2015. It is an outstanding event, held to increase public awareness of wilderness, wildlife and wild water in Alberta. The 24th *Climb and Run for Wilderness* attracted participants from 2 to 98 years old, with a diverse range of athletic ability. A family day, a corporate challenge day, a fun time, and a serious opportunity to test one's personal best are all combined in this event.

The event is known as the best Earth Day event in western Canada and this year attracted nearly 2,000 individual participants, volunteers, exhibitors, family and friends and other spectators. This year the Climb for Wilderness added another layer of competition with excellent results. The World

Tower Running event (Power Hour) attracted athletes from across Canada, United States and as far away as Germany. This elite event is the only event in Canada to be recognized as [a Premium Event](#) qualifying for the [Towerrunning World Cup](#), the worldwide acknowledged ranking for stair racers. The Climb and Run for Wilderness received significant earned media attention from such outlets as the Calgary Herald, Global, CBC and City TV as well as many local radio stations and outlets that display the event's brochures. People from all over western Canada and the United States and one participant from Europe resulted in \$100,000 in donations to AWA. Donations and corporate support for the event were noticeably decreased this year and this most likely reflects the economic downturn related to oil and gas sector declines in Calgary, Conservation groups and vendors set up displays throughout the Calgary Tower mall for the 13th Annual Wild Alberta Expo to help participants learn about their work and or their environmentally-focused products. Our zero waste initiative was well-received throughout the day and the event venue.

In the month prior to the climb day AWA has for 13 years, held a Mural Painting Competition that has produced an amazing gallery of murals on the walls of the stairwell. With more than 150 murals featuring wild lands, wildlife and wild water, the opportunity for artists to showcase their talents and for climbers to feel refreshed and inspired, the mural competition yields one of the signature aspects of the Climb and Run for Wilderness.

We made a significant advance in our registration process this year, and have almost achieved online registration for all participants. There were only a few who could not navigate the change and we look forward to almost 100% success in the transition to paperless registration and receipting processes for this event. Our website was completely rebuilt by Build Studio this year and they were able to make a seamless transition from our new wordpress based site to the commercial registration software we used seamless. Fees for the new service are a concern but the reduction in backend time and stress for AWA personnel is significant.

We believe this event is one of the very best opportunities Calgary has to help strengthen community. It provides opportunities for people of every age, creed and race. It is focused on a healthy environment, biodiversity, and a wealth of clean abundant water, wildlife and wild spaces for all of us. The event provides a challenge and connects AWA with celebrations for Earth Day around the world.

HILLHURST COTTAGE SCHOOL

The Hillhurst Cottage School now belongs to AWA. Our fundraising campaign was successful and more than 400 generous individuals helped us reach the target without needing a mortgage. We could not have achieved this significant milestone without so many who made such a difference. Even the neighborhood children had a lemon aid stand and donated the proceeds to the building fund.

We successfully applied for a federal infrastructure grant and those funds will be available as of April 2016. The funds will help with the cost of restoration of the hardwood floors and upgrades to the plumbing and heating.

COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the year, AWA participated in a wide range of community events, including conferences, workshops and talks. Examples include participation at various ENGO AGMs, such as those for the North

Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance and the Prairie Conservation Forum; attendance at Bow River, Red Deer River and other watershed alliance planning meetings; participation in Southern Foothills community meetings, presentations to school groups, water presentations to various community groups, and more. As is the case every year, AWA has continued to be active in the wider community, putting up displays at markets and specialized events. In May 2015, AWA hosted a display at the Kananaskis *Trails Fest* held at the Canmore Nordic Centre. This allowed outreach and advocacy work publicizing the need for designated trail networks and appropriate access management in the eastern slopes. It also provided an opportunity for networking with other organizations involved in hiking, and trail activities operating in southwestern Alberta.

While it can be difficult to estimate the number of people that take the opportunity to view the displays, these events remain an important tool coupled with other opportunities for outreach to engage with the community and raise awareness.

SCHOOLS AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

AWA school program helps bridge the gap between school and community initiatives and gives students a chance to get involved and learn more about conservation. In the last year, AWA presented and promoted our conservation work at five different schools ranging from elementary to university levels. As well we provided day camps to the Boys and Girls Club this summer that focused on healthy water. The day camps included 3 staff and 5 volunteers and helped 125 children and their leaders learn more about water and a healthy environment at Big Hill Springs.



Volunteer Dave Mayhood with children from AWA's Wilderness Defenders Summer Camp exploring pond and stream invertebrates

FINANCING WILDERNESS PROTECTION

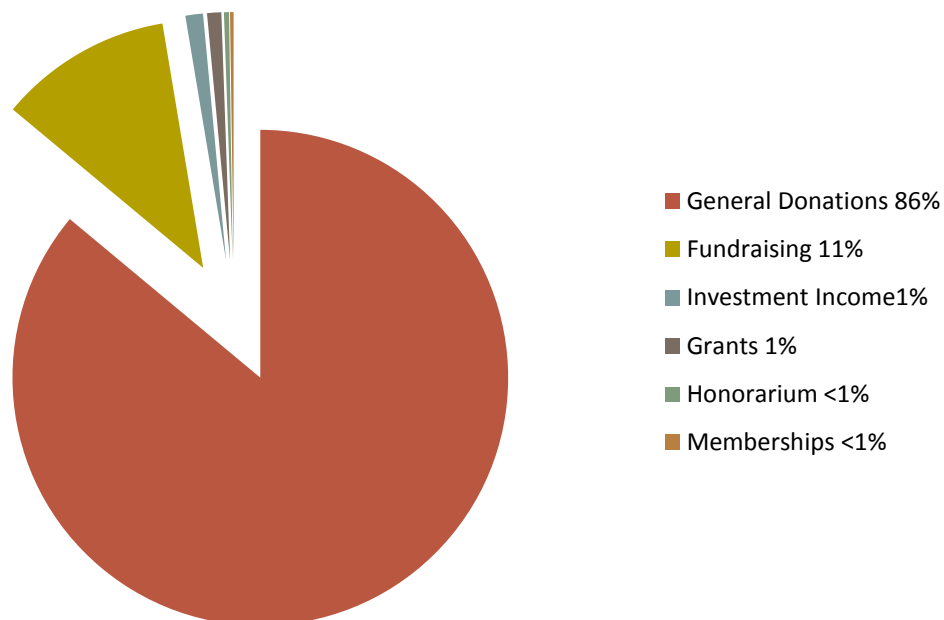
REVENUE

Funds received from donations by members, supporters and fundraising are vital to the health of AWA and provided 90% of our total revenue. Granting agencies in this year included Alberta Culture Recreation and Physical Activity Department and The Calgary Foundation. We have achieved our strategic goal to decrease dependence on foundation grants and we depend almost entirely on individual donor financial support.

Funding generated through events came from our annual Earth Day event Climb and Run for Wilderness, a Casino and the Wild West Gala in the fall. Fundraising and gifts from donors allow AWA to be financially independent and free to speak out for wilderness protection. In the past few years our target has been to strengthen our financial reserve along with the purchase the Hillhurst Cottage School in this fiscal year. We are extremely grateful to the many donors who enabled us to do this.

Our voting membership has grown modestly in the past year and stands at 4,756 individuals; representing 206 communities in Alberta, in addition to national and international members. We hope that a strong focus on membership development in the coming year will assist in creating a larger donor base.

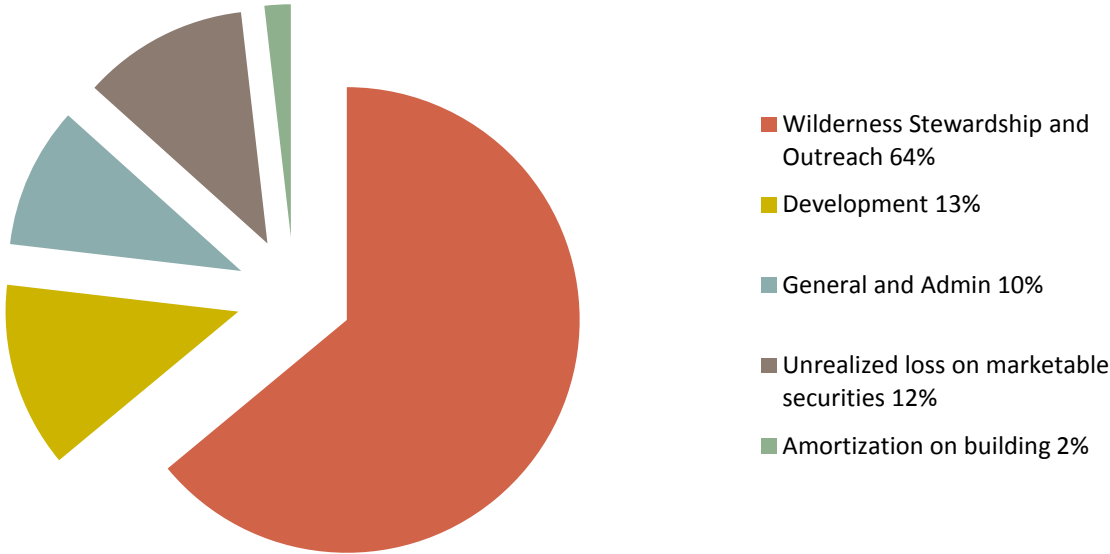
REVENUE 2014 - 2015



EXPENDITURES

AWA devotes 64% of its expenditures to wilderness stewardship, conservation, and outreach. This includes funding the Alberta Wilderness Resource Centre. Development costs include expenses incurred in developing our core values, and creating broader awareness of the association and its mandate, "Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action." This category includes the cost of seeking more members and supporters as well as applying for grants. General and Administrative costs of 10% represent an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism. Rent, insurance, telephone, office equipment and supplies, bank charges, audit charges, travel, and non-recoverable GST are included in General and Administration costs.

EXPENDITURES 2014 - 2015



REVIEW ENGAGEMENT REPORT

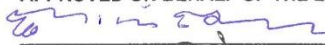
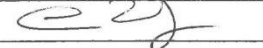
AWA engages Roberts and Company Professional Accountants LLP to conduct a review of AWA's financial statements each year. Their Review Engagement Report states that nothing has come to their attention that causes them to believe the financial statements are not, in all material respects, in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations. The statement of financial position at July 31, 2015 is shown below. AWA's complete Financial Statements are posted on our website.

**ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
(Unaudited)**

AS AT JULY 31, 2015

	<u>2015 Operating Fund</u>	<u>2015 Restricted Funds</u>	<u>2015 Total</u>	<u>2014 Total</u>
ASSETS				
CURRENT				
Cash and cash equivalents (Note 3)	\$ 485,165	\$ 20,939	\$ 506,104	\$ 905,360
Marketable securities (Note 4)	48,501	-	48,501	3,522
Accrued interest receivable	177	-	177	646
Prepaid expenses	9,991	-	9,991	6,595
GST receivable	19,069	-	19,069	2,047
Donated items held for auction	6,315	-	6,315	8,735
Deposit on land and building	-	-	-	66,000
	<u>569,218</u>	<u>20,939</u>	<u>590,157</u>	<u>992,905</u>
LAND AND BUILDING (Note 5)	<u>659,152</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>659,152</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>\$ 1,228,370</u>	<u>\$ 20,939</u>	<u>\$ 1,249,309</u>	<u>\$ 992,905</u>
LIABILITIES				
CURRENT				
Accounts payable and accrued	\$ 13,538	\$ 7,172	\$ 20,710	\$ 17,573
Wages payable	-	-	-	1,429
Payroll remittances payable	9,297	-	9,297	8,260
Deferred income	6,955	-	6,955	10,110
	<u>29,790</u>	<u>7,172</u>	<u>36,962</u>	<u>37,372</u>
FUND BALANCES				
Unrestricted	1,198,580	-	1,198,580	952,723
Restricted	-	13,767	13,767	2,810
	<u>1,198,580</u>	<u>13,767</u>	<u>1,212,347</u>	<u>955,533</u>
	<u>\$ 1,228,370</u>	<u>\$ 20,939</u>	<u>\$ 1,249,309</u>	<u>\$ 992,905</u>

APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD:

 Director
 Director

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE LEGACY CIRCLE

AWA is dedicated to securing a more deliberate long-term approach to funding security. The elements that are required are in place and in time will provide AWA with a healthy reserve fund. Each year our financial position strengthens.

BEQUESTS

It is the Board of Directors' hope that individuals, members, and supporters will make a bequest in their will naming a gift to AWA. Bequests to AWA will make a significant difference to our long-term security and our ability to plan for the future.

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE BEQUESTS

Daphne M. Smith 1980
Dr. James Birkett Cragg 1997
Anna Nowick 1999
Myrtle Muriel Koch 2001
Ian Ross 2003
Dorothy Barry 2003
William Mayer 2004
Diane Hughes 2005
Harold deVries 2009
Ann Roberts 2009
Richard Collier 2013

LIFETIME GIVING

AWA works to recognize all donors and the lifetime giving and commitment they make to the association. All those donors who make cumulative gifts greater than \$20,000 are recognized on a plaque initiated for AWA's 45th anniversary. These individuals will be designated as Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors.

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE BENEFACTORS

(INDIVIDUALS WITH LIFETIME GIVING GREATER THAN \$20,000)

Ian Ross
Bruce and Eveline Goodall
Richard and Vivian Pharis
Chris Saunders
Joe Vipond and Family
Cliff and Terry Wallis
Christyann Olson
Rosemary Nation
Lorne Fitch

Anonymous
Dorothy Berry & the Berndt Family
Clint and Julie Docken
Chris and Ken Havard
Mary Kettenbach
Laura Jackson
Linda and Jusuf Javeri
Anthony and Liz Fricke

MEMORIAL TRIBUTES

Memorial tributes provide an opportunity to contribute to AWA's long-term funding security. As a further memorial and tribute to those who have been remembered with a memorial gift to AWA by their family and friends, we have wall plaques with their names that hang in AWA's office and we are remembering them here in our annual Report.

DONATIONS IN MEMORIAM 2014-2015

Irene Anderson 1920 – 2014
P.K. Anderson 1927 – 2014
Ivy Brierley 1925 – 2015
Gail Buck 1950 – 2014
Jim Clampett 1933 -2014
Steve Dixon 1917 – 2014
Arlene Fearon 1939 – 2015
Wade Foster
Helen Giles 1918 – 2014
Ray Graham
Bill Hall 1938 – 2015
Christina Havard 1944 – 2015
Benjamin Karasek 1924 – 2014
Charles Lacy
David Manzer

Murray Manzer
Stewart McCrae 1929 -2015
Phyllis McDonald 1918 – 2015
Marilyn McKinley
Mary McPherson 1936 – 2015
Charles Miller 1921 – 2009
Elsie Mole 1936 – 2014
Delha Ng 1955 – 2015
Kim Schoff 1959 – 2015
Barry Simpkins 1937 – 2014
Teri Lee Tapay 1958 – 2014
Sharon Tranter 1940 – 2013
Kay Wallis 1929 – 2015
Robin White 1939 -2014

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust is a permanent endowment fund for Alberta's wilderness and an integral part of wilderness for tomorrow. Carefully nurtured, the fund will grow over the generations to come. Years from today, that fund will continue to provide for the care and protection of Alberta's natural landscapes.

The Trust began in 1986 as a memorial fund established as a tribute to biologist Orval Pall. Throughout the years, families seeking to remember their own loved ones have found solace and strength in devoting resources to the memorial fund, which was dedicated to support the protection of wilderness in Alberta. On the fifteenth anniversary of the fund, AWA established the Trust as an endowment fund with the Calgary Foundation in order to support the long-term sustainability of the Association. The

Trust will support wilderness programs and research that contribute to the protection, understanding, and appreciation of wilderness, wild waters, and wildlife. The current fund balance has not grown significantly but is a tribute to numerous small donations from concerned individuals. The fund suffered with the economic downturn and today the balance is \$25,765.38. The endowment fund's annual distribution (2015 – \$1064.00) is dedicated to the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture and the Wilderness Defender Awards.



Ken and Chris Havard, two outstanding examples of the philanthropic spirit that made AWA's purchase of Hillhurst Cottage School possible. Jose Quiroz

ANNUAL WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST GUEST LECTURE

Each year in November, AWA hosts the *Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture*, given by a renowned guest speaker. Sponsored by the Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust, the Annual Lecture is an opportunity to present the ideas of researchers, writers or those active in a field related to conservation of wilderness or wildlife. The lecture is meant to challenge AWA as well as to inform those attending. AWA presents these lectures in pursuit of its mission “Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action.”

Martha Kostuch was considered an expert in consensus-based decision making and her work helped join groups that traditionally might not have worked together. She sought ways to make the system work so we could move forward. Kostuch was a “feisty, fine woman, who never hesitated to speak her mind.” When she recognized things weren’t right, she would fight very hard, tirelessly, to make sure that there was a change and that it would be better for all of us.

Kostuch, who died April 23, 2008, was a national leader, an Alberta Wilderness Defender and a woman who leaves a vital legacy. AWA has honoured her legacy and her memory by naming our annual lecture the *Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture*.

The 2014 lecture was given by Dr. Ted Morton, former Minister of ESRD. The former minister recounted to a full house at Hillhurst Cottage School last November how he regards the Land Use Framework as one important success of his tenure as Sustainable Resource Development Minister. Morton, who was SRD Minister for just over three years beginning in 2006, gave AWA members something of an insider’s account of his time in one of Alberta’s key “conservation” ministries. He recounted the challenges he faced, the successes he had, as well as the challenges and opportunities he thinks are part of Alberta’s conservation landscape. Ian Urquhart wrote an article recounting Morton's lecture in the June 2015 *Wild Lands Advocate*.

WILDERNESS DEFENDERS AWARDS

The Alberta Wilderness Defenders Awards are dedicated to individuals who have particularly inspired us with their love of Alberta’s wild lands, wildlife and wild water, and their efforts and achievements for conservation. The Alberta Wilderness Association presents annual awards, to recognize such individuals. These individuals have recognized that Alberta’s wilderness is among the most pristine in the world and cannot be taken for granted. They know that our wild places are the source of our health, wealth, and quality of life and that we must take an active role in their conservation. This year, the award was presented to Tom Maccagno (posthumous) and Gus Yaki.

Tom Maccagno devoted his life to Alberta sharing his energy, intellect, love of nature and passion for local history. A lawyer by profession, Tom was a naturalist, conservationist and historian at heart. His passion led to the discovery of many orchid species and rare plants in the Lakeland district. Tom was a civic man who embraced local politics and served Lac La Biche as its mayor. Tenacious in his manner, he will be remembered for representing the public good and helping others be concerned with

environmental stewardship. His association with the protection of local parks and historical places is a lasting legacy.

Truly a life-long naturalist, even from grade school days, Gus Yaki walked several miles each day in North Battleford, Saskatchewan observing plants and animals along the way. In 1972, he founded his own nature travel company, leading outdoor tours across Canada and to many other countries. Gus leads nature walks and birding courses in and around Calgary encouraging environmental stewardship and awareness. He has received many awards and is known widely as a walking biological encyclopedia. An advocate for countless conservation causes, an ongoing supporter of AWA, and a passionate teacher Gus tirelessly shares his knowledge and inspires people of all ages and walks of life.

GREAT GRAY OWL AWARDS

Like the great gray owl, with unending patience and dedication to purpose, these individuals work in quiet wisdom to conserve wilderness habitat and wild creatures. Our success is a reflection of the enduring commitment they have made to Alberta Wilderness Association.

2010 marked the launch of AWA's *Great Gray Owl Award*. Inspired in particular by three outstanding women and the significant contribution they have made over the past several years, this award will be presented annually as individuals meet the high standard of volunteerism, dedication and commitment of these inaugural award winners. Anne Fabris, Linda Javeri and Margaret Main were the 2010 recipients of the award. Ed Hergott, tireless supporter of our outreach program and events, received the award in 2011. Paul Sutherland and Nuno Fragoso were awarded the Great Gray Owl in 2013 and in 2014 we recognized Heather Crone for her outstanding commitment as a volunteer and her untiring willingness to help.

Heather Crone has been a pillar of physical and emotional strength as an outstanding volunteer and friend to AWA. Throughout her years assisting AWA, she has become known for saying "I have a tool for that!" as she always without complaint and so very willingly helps with whatever task is put forward. We are so pleased to honour her with our top volunteer award!

HOPE FOR TOMORROW

Above all however, is the absolute certainty that we care and we will take a stand and we will have *Hope for Tomorrow*.

- *Christyann Olson*



Kids Wilderness Defenders Summer Day Camp 2015

