

# 2015-2016 Annual Report

*Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action for 51 years*



Alberta Wilderness Association



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

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# ANNUAL REPORT 2015 - 2016



Buffalo Lake Alberta - *Dan Olson*

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Contributions to the Annual Report are provided by  
AWA board and staff members.

COVER PHOTO – VIEW FROM POCATERRA RIDGE – ANDREA JOHANSIK



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# WILDERNESS FOR TOMORROW



I am pleased to write and bring together the story of another full and challenging year for AWA in this our annual report. The pages that follow tell the story of hard work and determination by a dedicated and passionate group of people that I am proud to be the Executive Director for.

We all know that an organization like AWA cannot achieve or succeed without the support of many, and in tough economic and perhaps some pretty tough political times this past year, we have done well. Our frugal and careful planning has helped during the economic downturn and while we have built our reserve funds to carry us through hard times, we are optimistic that members and donors will continue their faithful support as we move into our coming fiscal year.

I am thrilled to have young dynamic conservation specialists join our staff this year and help us move forward on a number of difficult issues. Our faithful and untiring accountant Anne Fabris retired this year and the transition to new roles and support staff has gone well.

Overall, we have had more letters, notes and cards thanking us for all we do. Many supporters have written on issues that concern them and we believe that together we are making progress on our vision of a network of protected representative wild spaces throughout Alberta.

I trust this report will give a sense of where we have come from and where we still have to get to. Please know we are inspired by your support.

Christyann Olson,  
Executive Director  
19 November, 2016



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## WHO WE ARE



AWA is blessed to have courageous and passionate conservation staff, energetic volunteers, a progressive Board of Directors, and a growing and supportive membership base. Keeping us all together and on track with her steady hand is our inspiring and steadfast Executive Director, Christyann Olson. Combining all of our collective talents we continue to Defend Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action!

Each one of our dedicated conservationists takes a lead role on key initiatives for the Association. This year, Joanna Skrajny led an initiative that saw a group of dedicated conservationists, scientists, and others come together and write a communiqué about the future of our Eastern Slopes. Much like AWA's early 1970s publication Eastern Slopes Wildlands, the communiqué is a reasoned and principled call for decision makers to protect our headwaters, prime

protection zones, and wildlife habitat.

Carolyn Campbell has spent many long hard hours working with others to recommend the best ways to protect Alberta's threatened caribou herds. "Boreal Bonanza, Foothills Fiasco" was AWA's response to the recovery strategy the government released. The positive aspects of the strategy need to be strengthened by changing forestry practices and protecting the Little Smoky and A La Peche herds.

Andrea Johancsik, new to our staff this year, has stepped up to represent AWA in a coalition of landowners, environmental groups and stewards, working to ensure the government formulates an excellent footprint and recreation plan for the Porcupine Hills and Livingstone area. A draft plan for the Porcupine Hills/Livingstone area is expected later this year and we will need your help to speak up for a strong management plan.

Our greater sage-grouse work is making a difference! Our team has acted to ensure the Emergency Protection Order for greater sage-grouse is being implemented and we sincerely hope the trajectory of sage-grouse extinction in Alberta has turned the corner.

Westslope cutthroat trout have suffered badly from the actions of government, industry and motorized recreationists, however our work on this initiative has made a real difference also! At the last minute the Federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans responded positively to our letters and arguments and issued a Critical Habitat Order. Detailing the habitat required for cutthroat trout is underway and we are seeing provincial and federal enforcement of the order.

We continue to apply pressure for the full protection of the Castle area. Of particular concern is the provincial government's concept of "a modern provincial park class". We have participated in countless meetings, conference calls, and information sessions. We have also written letters, articles, and editorials urging the Minister responsible not to allow off highway vehicles (OHVs) in these new parks.

As AWA moves into our 51st year, we continue to work towards our collective vision for Alberta, to have a comprehensive system of protected wild areas and engage all Albertans in decision-making processes, policies and laws that recognize the value of nature for its own sake.

Owen McGoldrick, President , November 19, 2016

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President:	Owen McGoldrick, Calgary
First Vice-President:	Jim Campbell, Calgary
Second Vice-President:	Richard Secord, Edmonton
Secretary/Treasurer:	Cliff Wallis, Calgary
Directors:	Clint Docken, Bragg Creek Chris Saunders, Calgary Frank Calder, Edmonton Kirsten Pugh, Calgary – <i>resigned October 2016</i> Gail Docken, Edmonton Joe Vipond, Calgary
Director Emeritus:	Herbert G. Kariel, Calgary Vivian Pharis, Cochrane

*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.*

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## STAFF

Executive Director:	Christyann Olson, BN, MSc
Conservation Specialists:	Carolyn Campbell, BA, BEd, MA, MBA Sean Nichols, BSc ( <i>resigned April</i> ) Brittany Verbeek, BSc ( <i>resigned January</i> ) Joanna Skrajny, BSc Andrea Johancsik, BSc
Wild Lands Advocate Editor:	Ian Urquhart, PhD
Administrative Associates:	Diane Mihalcheon Cindy Ralston ( <i>resigned May</i> )

*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 and outreach.*

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# 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.



Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve - AWA Stewardship Day  
Placing signs on the boundary of the reserve - *Christyann Olson*

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# 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 have 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 in both research and administration.

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 with politicians on issues concerning wilderness conservation in the province.

The following pages provide a review of our work. We may not yet have 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 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.

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# 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.

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. In addition to adding newly designated protected areas to our map, we were able to create the following maps to support our work this year.

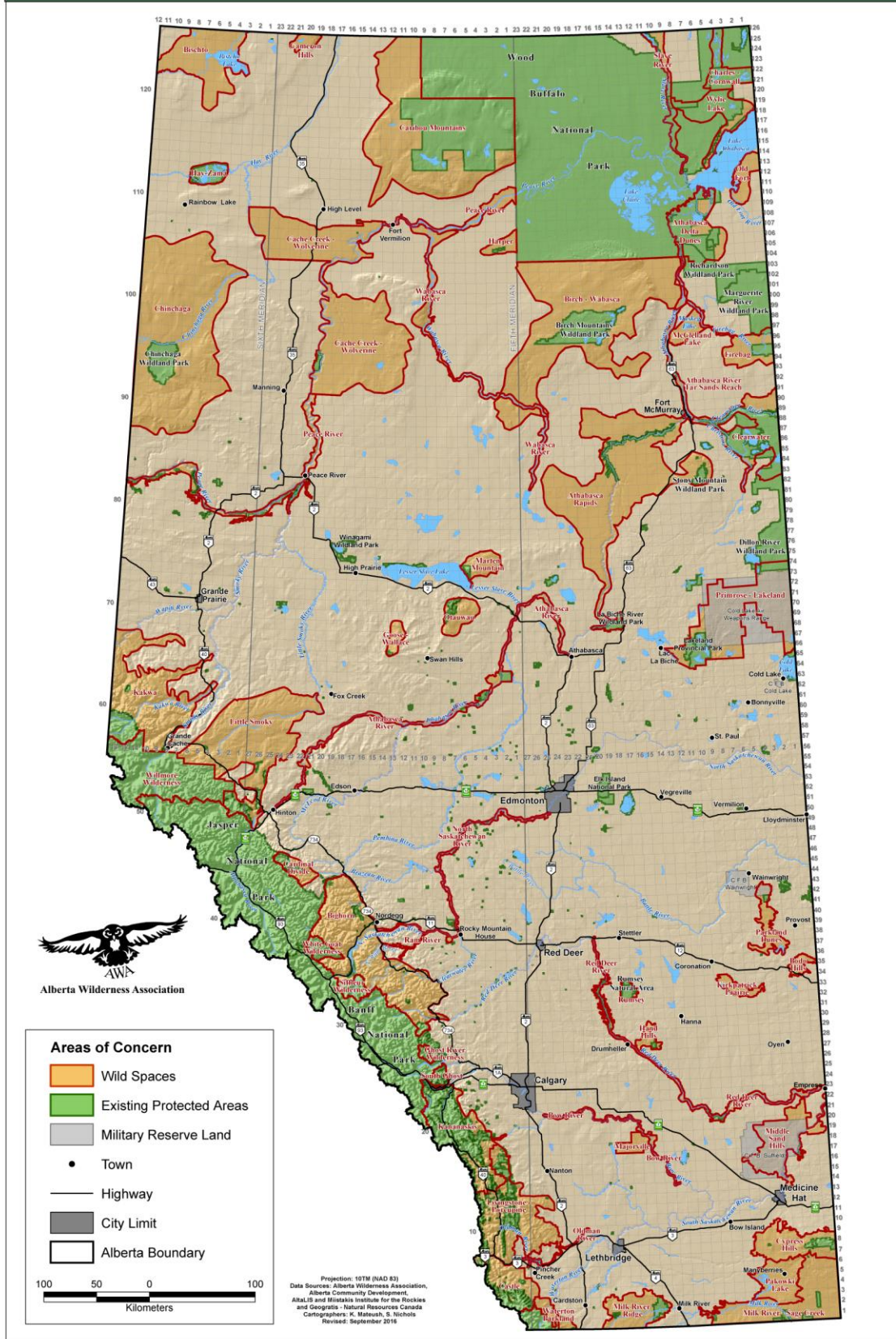
**Protected Area by Natural Region** – An update of AWA’s ‘Wild Alberta’ map showing the area protected by natural region, including the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and South Saskatchewan Regional Plan protected areas.

**Threats to Native Trout in the Oldman** – ongoing development of a map of the threats to Bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in the Oldman Watershed.

**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.

# Wild Alberta



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# 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 previous years and again in 2016 we have made our concern for sustainable Lakeland development known to the Alberta government.

We have briefed the Government of Alberta (GoA) 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 is supportive of the GoA's decision to close northern lakes to angling, and support sustainable fisheries use in these northeast lakes that are susceptible to angling pressure.

We continue to keep a watch on updates from Alberta Parks. In particular, we verified that proposed comfort cabin campground will be built in the Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area, not the Lakeland Provincial Park. During the coming fiscal year, we will focus on member and supporter engagement to learn more about the Primrose Lakeland area and ways to be involved in keeping this rich area intact and protected.

### 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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. A June 2016 *Wildlands Advocate* article brought attention to the important values of this area. 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. As of June 2016, there is still no approved plan to mine in the McClelland watershed. With the roll-out of the wetland policy for the green zone this year, AWA seeks stronger protection for peat wetlands generally, including McClelland wetland as an outstanding example, and continues to monitor developments there.



## 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 km<sup>2</sup>) 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 marsh birds. 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. AWA was instrumental in helping to get the oil and gas industry out of the complex three years ahead of schedule in 2014.

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 to ensure that reclamation proceeds on schedule despite the financial challenges that oil and gas companies are facing in the current environment. 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 GoA 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.

## PEACE RIVER VALLEY



*Peace River Valley Highland Park - Carolyn Campbell*

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 caused by reservoir-based instream hydro. AWA continues to work closely with groups and local citizens to ensure Alberta does not allow this dam. AWA is part of the 'Friends of the Peace River Valley' coalition working to maintain water flows and important river corridor habitat.

AWA's work was significant in TransAlta's 2015 cancellation of its Dunvegan dam project but it seems the dam proposals keep coming. 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. AWA wrote to provincial and federal authorities about the need for federal assessment and a more rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment. The Amisk hydroelectric dam project timelines have been extended, and AWA is pleased the project will receive a joint federal-provincial review. Preliminary discussions with Alberta Environment and Parks indicate a high level of concern within government and we are optimistic that we will once again protect the Peace River valley from inappropriate hydro development.

## CHINCHAGA

The Chinchaga is a large foothills area in northwestern Alberta, much of which has already been significantly impacted by industry. The Chinchaga was recommended by the Alberta government as the single best place for a large protected area in Alberta's Foothills Natural Region but only protected 800 km<sup>2</sup> under Special Places legislation. AWA is seeking Wildland Park protection for 6,500 km<sup>2</sup> of the Chinchaga.

In June 2016, the GoA announced that it was accepting the recommendations of its appointed mediator on woodland caribou range management, including permanently protecting an additional 1.8 million hectares in northwest Alberta. One specific recommendation was to quintuple the size of Chinchaga Wildland Provincial Park, extending it by 347, 600 hectares, in order to protect 25% of the Chinchaga caribou range. AWA supported this concept in early 2016, during renewed caribou range stakeholder consultations, and AWA welcomed the government's commitment to expand this protected area. Another recommendation was to complete a Chinchaga caribou range plan by the end of 2016, showing how 65% habitat protection would be achieved over time. We will remain engaged on the implementation of these commitments.

## BISTCHO

Bistcho is a remote and serene wilderness region in the far northwestern corner of Alberta. The area is a diverse subarctic wetland composed of sphagnum peat plateau bogs with collapse scars and channel fens. Within the subarctic ecosystem, soil, vegetation, and wildlife are known to be extremely sensitive to human activities.

Bistcho means “Big Sleep” in the language of the local First Nation, the Dene Tha’. At 426 km<sup>2</sup>, Bistcho Lake is one of the largest lakes in the province. It is unusually shallow, with an average depth of less than two metres, and is popular with anglers, who report catches of 40-lb pike, 14-lb walleye, and 12-lb whitefish.

The Dene Tha’ of Chateh and Hay-Zama has expressed interest in seeing the Bistcho Area of Concern protected as a Wildland Park. No further 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.

One recommendation by a government-appointed mediator on woodland caribou range management was to permanently protect Forest Management Unit F20. This would add 8700 km<sup>2</sup> of permanent protection to the Bistcho caribou range, which currently has no protected areas. The recommendations also included establishing inter-provincial planning committees with BC and the NWT and completing range plans by the end of 2016. In June 2016, the GoA announced that it was accepting these recommendations. AWA supported a new Bistcho Wildland Provincial Park in early 2016 caribou range stakeholder consultations, and welcomed the government’s commitment.

## CARIBOU MOUNTAINS

Caribou Mountains Wildland Park (5,910 km<sup>2</sup>) 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 Wildland Park. In early 2007, AWA submitted extensive suggestions to the GoA, maintaining the area in its relatively undisturbed state. As of August 2016, 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.”

One recommendation made in May 2016 by a GoA appointed mediator for woodland caribou range management was to permanently protect the 6000 km<sup>2</sup> Forest Management Unit F10 in northwest Alberta. F10 is adjacent to the western borders of Wood Buffalo National Park and Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park. Establishing a Wildland Provincial Park over the F10 area would bring permanent protection to about 70% of the Yates woodland caribou range and add an important protected area for the Caribou Mountains caribou population. It would represent great progress towards a minimum of 65% undisturbed habitat in these ranges, as mandated for all boreal woodland caribou ranges by the federal caribou recovery strategy. In June 2016, the GoA accepted these recommendations. AWA supported this concept in early 2016, during renewed caribou range stakeholder consultations, and welcomed the government’s commitment to it. The mediator also recommended pursuing an opportunity to protect most of the F23 Forest Management Unit, south of Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park. AWA will seek the implementation of these commitments and proposals.



Display opportunities throughout the year provide an opportunity to help a number of participants learn about AWA’s work across the province - *Sean Nichols*

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

AWA works towards protection and better management of wilderness throughout Alberta's Eastern Slopes particularly in those areas we have identified as Wild Spaces. A collaborative and vital initiative in this year saw the writing and issue of the Eastern Slopes Communiqué describing the urgent need for protection of our Eastern Slopes that asked the GoA to take definitive action.

### Northern and Central Eastern Slopes

#### 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 understanding of true wilderness and place little value on it. There is an ongoing push for fixed roof structures and routes to make access within the park easier.

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 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.

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

As we look forward to the next fiscal year, AWA will work to see a management plan developed and put in place and seek guarantees of protection for the status of Willmore Wilderness Park.

#### 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. In November 2015, Grande Cache Coal closed its coal mine in the area and laid off 220 employees.

AWA works to urge the government to prepare Species At Risk Act-compliant caribou range plans. The GoA’s decision in July 2016 to defer all new energy leasing in caribou ranges until range plans are completed is a step in the right direction.

## LITTLE SMOKY

The Little Smoky region’s foothills forests have become 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 and A La Peche caribou populations are, at best, barely stabilized by a nine year GoA wolf cull that is an unethical band-aid substitute for addressing industrial habitat destruction that drives caribou population declines. 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.

AWA co-led a strong NGO and conservation group coalition to meet with the newly elected government in fall of 2015 and underlined the urgency of better managing land and water impacts from the intensive fracking activity in the area. AWA also emphasized the importance of including environmental voices in the caribou range planning groups. AWA is pleased to be included again, along with other ENGOs and First Nations communities, in the caribou range planning and we worked hard for better solutions that protect and restore habitat for caribou, while accommodating some of the socioeconomic challenges. We continue to seek the end of in-range logging and the sharing of timber allocation outside the ranges as a high priority.

The GoA chose the two woodland caribou ranges in this region (Little Smoky and A La Peche) to develop precedent-setting range plans required under the federal Species at Risk Act and in May 2016, the government made a historic decision to protect extensive areas of four endangered woodland caribou ranges in its far north. The draft range plan for the Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou populations was released in June 2016 and AWA helped encourage many members of the public to provide their comments on the draft range plan to strengthen habitat provisions for caribou.

AWA continued to engage the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) and we are encouraged that AER, as of summer 2016, committed to better practices for water management. Stronger land disturbance and aquatic ecosystem measures are still needed to manage impacts within acceptable limits for sensitive native fish.

## 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 km<sup>2</sup>, 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). Our request has not varied in the last 20 years and is based on the expertise of our board members and staff and on the ground knowledge of the area. The 8000km<sup>2</sup> Bighorn Back country consists of a 5000km<sup>2</sup> pristine wilderness area that AWA proposes would be best protected as a Wildland Provincial Park. An additional 3000km<sup>2</sup> with some existing development makes an ideal transition zone and would be a Provincial Recreation Area. AWA is firmly opposed to any commercial development or motorized recreation within the Wildland; however AWA agrees the transition zone offers limited scope for these land uses.



## TRAIL MONITORING

AWA continues monitoring the motorized trail network in the area of the Upper Ram/Clearwater Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ), 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. Two more trips are being conducted in 2016 which will monitor the same extent of the trail network as in 2015. Our work in this area is dependent on volunteers and we will maintain our presence monitoring the motorized access and damaged sites.

Two additional trips to download data from TRAFx units buried at strategic points on the Upper Ram/Clearwater motorized access trail system were conducted. These units count vehicle traffic on the trails. During 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 Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) 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 seen, despite two relatively dry seasons in 2013-2014, and in 2014-2015. In 2014, sections of the trail along Canary Creek were rebuilt under the GoA's Backcountry Trail Flood Rehabilitation program (BTFRP). These sections were built to a high engineering standard yet less than ten months later, these new sections were already suffering significant erosion and soil slumping (see photo below). The BTFRP was established after the floods of 2013 to restore trails across the Eastern Slopes. It has a budget of \$10 million and work is expected to be complete in March 2017.



*Slumping encountered on the Canary Creek trail less than 10 months after it was rebuilt under the BTFRP*

This year, the first trip was in early July 2016, the particularly dry seasons of the two years previous continued. Noticeable additional damage was observed along the entire portion of the rerouted Canary Trail, with portions of the trail on the slope continuing to slump. Even trail portions not on a slope had experienced significant damage, despite the fact that there still had not been significant precipitation in the area since the trail had been built.



*Part of the rerouted Canary Trail that was built in 2014. One of the newest additions to the trail network and already showing significant vegetation and soil damage; further demonstrating that motorized use is simply not a sustainable activity in these sensitive headwaters areas. Photo - Joanna Skrajny*

In August following what was almost a month of consistent rainfall. We noted that the Canary trails - which we had visited previously - were closed on July 28. Although it is important to recognize that a closure took place, it was after almost a month of continued activity on extremely wet trails.







The trails which remained open also had significant amounts of erosion damage and water on the trails. Much of the hummingbird trail was covered in water, even during the return trip home which was two days after the last rainfall. Use on these trails is unsustainable even during dry periods due to the soft nature of the soils and the short growing season, and the effects are only exacerbated with periods of rain.

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 to vehicles. In presentations to staff of Alberta Environment and Parks, AWA continues to reiterate that the damage indicates that the topography, soil, and vegetation of the region are not able to withstand motorized recreation. AWA continues to advocate for permanent trail closures to vehicles within the Prime Protection and Critical Wildlife Zones of the Eastern Slopes.

#### 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 was no maintenance done in 2014. 2015 was a far drier year than the previous two, and trail cleanup and clearing was completed. During the 2016 summer season we decided to postpone trail maintenance until 2017 in favour of the trail reconnaissance work needed by government trail rehabilitation staff to confirm plans for rebuilding the trail in the Wapiabi and George Creek drainage section of the trail. The work is planned for 2017.

## SOUTHERN EASTERN SLOPES REGION

The southern eastern slopes 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 the southern part of Kananaskis Country 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 area referred to as 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.

AWA's efforts in the South Ghost included partnering with Stop Ghost Clearcut to increase awareness of lawless behaviour and unchecked OHV activities in the Ghost. Stop Ghost Clearcut was a signatory to the Eastern Slopes Communiqué and prepared a News Release as part of the campaign which received wide uptake. AWA has written to the GoA in support of increased enforcement in the Ghost. It is only one snapshot of many areas experiencing similar problems throughout the Eastern Slopes' headwaters, resulting from uncontrolled OHV use and abuse, illegal firearms and weapons discharge, and lack of enforcement.



*Photo - Ghost Valley Community*

Under the BTRFP significant work on motorized recreation trails was completed in the past year and is anticipated to continue until March 2017. The work included rerouting trails and building bridges to minimize impacts to westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat. AWA remains concerned about the problems the trails themselves contribute, including increased sediment delivery, habitat fragmentation, and stresses to wildlife. The ecosystem must be considered first and only then is it appropriate to see where recreation can fit once vital natural ecosystems, including the security of our headwaters and our watersheds are protected.

The Ghost Watershed Alliance Society (GWAS) continued its important work of raising awareness and educating the public about the importance of, and the threats to, the Ghost River watershed. The most important project is the State of the Watershed (SOW) report which is being prepared by the ALCES consulting group. Unfortunately, the consultants are experiencing problems with access to vegetation and forestry data (logging cutblocks), and the GoA has not been very helpful. Nonetheless, it is expected that this important report will be completed in early 2017. GWAS is also cooperating with the GoA in trail restoration and bioengineering projects in the Ghost watershed; these are OHV trails

that were damaged, mainly during the 2013 flood. The group continued its popular “Walks in the Watershed” and an AWA hike went to the Ghost watershed in July.

AWA has been, for many years, a contributing member of the Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group (GSMG), a group of stakeholders whose purpose has been to ensure reasonable access to all users while protecting the character of the area. In April 2016 the members of the GSMG voted to dissolve the group. This was done because it is expected that the more comprehensive recreation management planning process, to be implemented by Alberta Environment & Parks, will replace the work of the GSMG. Public meetings in connection with recreational planning in the Ghost are expected to commence in 2017.

## KANANASKIS COUNTRY

AWA undertook stewardship visits to Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve in Kananaskis Country in October and November 2015 and June 2016. Work done in the area included recording observations, installing signs and removing debris and garbage. The last trip was undertaken with GoA and industry colleagues. AWA will continue to work with partners to steward this important and unique reserve.

AWA has noticed that Back Country Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program (BTFRP) funding has been used to rebuild trails that were inappropriately sited in sensitive headwaters landscapes. Some of the trails being repaired with these funds should never have been built in the first place. Trails and bridges contribute to erosion and sedimentation in streams, which can have a negative impact on native aquatic ecosystems and watershed health. AWA is disappointed the BTFRP focused more on restoring badly-sited OHV trails rather than much-needed landscape restoration and non-motorized recreation trails.

Under the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), various areas were proposed to be designated as new or expanded protected areas. AWA is waiting for the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland to be expanded, as promised, and for new and expanded parks in Kananaskis including Don Getty, Bow Valley, Bluerock, High Rock Wildland Provincial Parks and Sheep River Provincial Park.

## CASTLE WILDLAND

Two new parks were declared in the Castle Wildland on September 4, 2015: one a Provincial Park and the other a Wildland Provincial Park. Together these two parks will encompass nearly 1,050 km<sup>2</sup> of sensitive wilderness area. AWA has been advocating for the protection of this area since our founding days in 1965, and we are encouraged to see protection come to fruition. However, throughout the past year we realized that our initial elation was premature.

The September 2015 management proposals from Alberta Environment and Parks, suggest a level of protection that is more symbolic than real. True legislative protection of the Castle Area is critical to ensure that protection of the Castle Wilderness is substantive and allows restoration of this magnificent area as a vital wilderness legacy for generations to come. The GoA is to be congratulated for ending commercial forestry, coal and mineral extraction, and new surface access to oil and gas developments in the Castle. However, the proposed list of planned land designations in the parks contains activities such as motorized recreation, grazing and hunting, which are not compatible with the concept of a provincial

park and restoration that this fragile land needs. When these activities are allowed to continue the already-damaged ecosystem will continue to degrade.

Since the designation, AWA has worked very hard with colleagues, including Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, Timberwolf Wilderness Society, and others, in support of a permanent ban of OHVs in the proposed Castle parks. This is a part of a wider Eastern Slopes Campaign that AWA has been coordinating since December 2015 (see Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow Campaign). The campaign calls for the GoA to sustainably manage Alberta's Eastern Slopes. That call includes banning OHV recreation from the proposed Castle Parks in three designated areas; Prime Protection Zone, Critical Wildlife Zone and Critical Habitat for Species at Risk including the habitat of westslope cutthroat trout and other endangered species. Countless meetings and briefings have taken place and AWA has presented and emphasized these important zones and basic principles for true protection of the Castle area. AWA is credited with activating many members of the public in letter writing and speaking out on the future of the Castle parks.

Meaningful protection of the Castle parks will ensure restoration to truly achieve the wilderness values of headwater security and prime wildlife habitat. The area has endured extensive damage from the cumulative impacts of a variety of overlapping land uses. Only a decision to prohibit environmentally destructive activities will restore the Castle parks. A final decision on the designation and management plan for the parks is still pending.



*Crowsnest River - Ian Urquhart*

## LIVINGSTONE-PORCUPINE

AWA's major concerns over Livingstone-Porcupine 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 interest in renewed coal development and pollution from earlier coal mining activities.

The Porcupine Hills Coalition, formed last year from concerned individuals, organizations (including AWA), and municipalities, has now expanded to include 39 signatories. The Coalition has been meeting regularly with government planners since the process of Land Footprint Management Planning (LFMP) and Recreation Management Planning (RMP) has begun, a priority under the SSRP.

The Coalition decided with consensus on a Statement of Principles that guides its work and ultimately aims to guide the work of the planning process. These principles include the recognition of watershed and biodiversity first, using an integrated approach that considers adjacent private land and the visions of land stewardship organizations. The principles require recognition that the current condition of the Porcupine Hills is not an adequate baseline, using information from the existing and comprehensive Southern Foothills Study and acknowledging the precedent-setting nature of this planning across the Eastern Slopes.

In the spring, AWA worked with other members of the Porcupine Hills Coalition to finalize recommendations for strengthening the LFMP and improving zoning. The planners have responded positively to the Coalition's recommendations. Their work and consultation is ongoing and the outcome is pending. The recreation planning stakeholder consultation also began and AWA is advocating for a process that represents the majority of Albertans and prioritizes financially and ecologically sustainable low-impact recreation and tourism.

As AWA researched and prepared for the planning process, using linear disturbance data, clearcut data, and wet areas mapping data, AWA produced an interior watershed assessment procedure map for the Carbondale watershed. The resulting map provided insight into how much of the wet area receives disturbance, the total size of the clear cuts, and the ways roads influence wet areas.

The Grassy Mountain Coal Mine is located within AWA's Livingstone-Porcupine Area of Concern. AWA remains engaged in the coalition of AWA and the Grassy Mountain Group, which will participate should the proposed coal mining project go to hearing (see Energy – Coal for further information).

AWA would like to see a LFMP developed that sets hard, scientifically-sound limits on linear disturbance and land use in the region with satisfactory implementation and enforcement. This would help protect much of the habitat of threatened westslope cutthroat trout and other species at risk such as grizzly bear.

AWA continues to meet with the Coalition, other ENGOs and government to strengthen planning.

## 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 for and implementing ways to minimize the impacts of development on this landscape, as well as developing programs to minimize conflicts with wildlife.

AWA continues supporting landowners in the region and watching for proposals in the Waterton Parkland area that may pose a threat. A field tour by the Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association (WBRA), in cooperation with local municipal governments, looked at ways for local communities to live alongside carnivore populations. AWA attended and supports the WBRA innovative programs which work to the benefit of both wildlife and people.

## PARKLAND REGION

### RUMSEY

Aspen parkland once stretched over 255,000 km<sup>2</sup> 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 the World. It represents a landscape that is almost extinct and provides a valuable ecological benchmark.

Progress has been 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." AWA regards this as an encouraging first step in the long-term phase out of oil and gas activity in the Natural Area. AWA reviewed a long-awaited confidential draft of a management plan for Rumsey in 2015 and continues 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

After a brief absence, AWA has once again been invited to serve 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. One of AWA's Outreach Program hikes this year was to the dunes.

### ANTELOPE HILLS PROVINCIAL PARK

The 2015 newly created 380 hectare Provincial Park near Hanna thanks to a generous donor, Gottlob Schmidt. It is not open to the public currently and will not be for some time. Parks agrologists, botanists and biologists are conducting extensive baseline surveys of this beautiful parkland landscape park. This is a significant addition to the Alberta Parks system.

## GRASSLANDS REGION

Protected area targets have not been met in the Grassland Natural Region in Alberta, the targets 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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 (CFB) 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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 NWA 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. In the coming year AWA plans to dedicate staffing resources to the Suffield NWA.

## 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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. 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.

## 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 of a quality 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 SSRP 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 GoA has recognized the area as needing protection in the recently released SSRP. 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 stepped up pressure for protection of this area. While recognized for protection in the SSRP, government is continuing to allow applications for new oil development in this sensitive area.

## 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 and Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve. This rolling grassland in extreme southeastern Alberta contains a wide variety of habitats supporting hundreds of native species, including dozens which are species of conservation concern. 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.

During the last 3 years, the MRMS has undertaken experimental grazing on the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve to study the effects of grazing on attempts to reduce invasive and non-native plant species.

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 voluntary coalition of stakeholder groups whose members are interested in the conservation of native prairie and parkland environments in Alberta. It is a common platform to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and promote conservation of these environments. Developing and renewing the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP) is one of the main roles of the PCF. The latest PCAP expired at the end of 2015, and AWA participated in drafting the new PCAP. It was released January 2016 and will be applicable until 2020.

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.

## PRAIRIE CONSERVATION AND ENDANGERED SPECIES CONFERENCE (PCESC)

AWA attended the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Saskatoon. This event is held every three years in rotation across the prairie provinces. It is a chance to share what is working and what isn't in prairie conservation. Attendees are a rich diversity of landowners, scientists, conservation organizations and industry and agency personnel. Federal species at risk, grassland restoration and grassland birds were popular topics but there were dozens of other presentations on everything from invasive species to looking at the large landscape and motivating people to action. A highlight was a heartfelt presentation from Miles Anderson, a rancher who "grows" Greater Sage-grouse and cattle on his ranch and on Grasslands National Park lands in southern Saskatchewan.

## 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.



Children eager to learn about ecosystems during summer camp— *Brittany Verbeek*

## 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. The GoA announced in October 2015 that it planned to proceed with the Springbank Off-Stream Reservoir along with providing local flood mitigation protection for Bragg Creek, Redwood Meadows, and additional projects. Although AWA would prefer for flood mitigation to occur through 'Room for the River' initiatives such as moving communities out of the floodplains, we recognize, and are supportive of, the government's use of independent experts in flood protection and the decision not to proceed with the McLean Creek Dam. The Springbank Off-Stream Reservoir will have lower potential environmental impacts over the proposed alternative McLean Creek Dam. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency announced on June 23 2016 that a Federal Environmental Impact Assessment is required for the off-stream reservoir, AWA will follow the process closely and speak out on potential adverse environmental impacts.

AWA's *Fish and Forests* coordinating initiative from the North Saskatchewan to Oldman headwaters, led by Conservation Specialist Joanna Skrajny, was active 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. In the Bow River basin, AWA continues to encourage flood recovery work that focuses on enhancing ecological health.

AWA continues to coordinate a good deal 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.

AWA's Carolyn Campbell began her second-year in a two-year term as a board member of the Athabasca Watershed Council, as a voice for healthy aquatic ecosystems. AWA, with teams including other conservation sector members, supported conservation goals and work towards a Water for Life implementation review and lake watershed management planning. In the Fall of 2015, the GoA published an action plan around water conservation consultation. AWA is concerned about the rollback of broader commitments to healthy aquatic ecosystems.

## 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 although much more change is required. Policies need to move towards considering forests

values far beyond the price of timber, they need to consider the purification of water and air, water storage and the related slow release; sadly this is not happening.

AWA has supported many local communities and watershed groups to strengthen their advocacy against clear cut logging and off-highway vehicle abuse in the Eastern Slopes. AWA believes that there is a unifying theme to these 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.

## FISH AND FORESTS INITIATIVE

This 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.

AWA hosted two *Fish and Forests* roundtables this year. 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. Fish and Forests partners will continue to monitor forest harvest operations closely and work together to raise awareness about poor forest management practices.

## EASTERN SLOPES FOR TOMORROW CAMPAIGN

The *Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow Campaign* was another AWA led collaboration launched on December 4, 2015, when a group of scientists and conservationists met in Calgary to discuss the future of our Eastern Slopes. A communiqué was produced outlining the actions required to restore conservation and watershed protection as the top priority for Alberta's Eastern Slopes.

These actions include:

- Ban OHVs from protected areas in Alberta's Eastern Slopes, including the new Castle Parks, and from areas identified by the province as *Prime Protection* and *Critical Wildlife Zones*. OHVs represent a land-use incompatible with the purpose of Provincial Parks.
- Permanently close and decommission trails in *Threatened* westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat, the destruction of which is illegal under the recently issued Critical Habitat Order.
- Reduce the existing road and motorized trail density in Alberta's Eastern Slopes to scientifically defensible levels.

The communiqué was sent to the GoA on January 13, 2016. The campaign has received widespread public support since the joint News Release on January 26, with 67 total signatories to the communiqué. Subsequent news releases by groups such as Timberwolf Wilderness Society, Stop Ghost Clearcut, the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, West Athabasca Bioregional Society, Livingstone Landowners Guild, and the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, have helped to keep this issue circulating in the news. There have been at least 30 recorded news items in print media alone.

The greater public in Alberta has been increasingly frustrated by the failure of governments to exercise oversight and sustainable management of our public lands. Decisive actions which prioritize Albertans' health and well-being, and properly value intact and healthy landscapes are long overdue. Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow partners will continue to raise awareness and speak up for responsible land management decisions in Alberta's Eastern Slopes.

## FSC CANADA

FSC Canada released its draft National Standard for Canada on December 1 which will replace the current four regional standards. AWA provided comments on the draft Standard and submitted a letter outlining our concerns and areas of support. The draft Standard includes positive developments, such as the requirement to use independent qualified specialists to assess High Conservation Values in forests, a requirement to develop plans for managing habitat frequented by species at risk, and an entire indicator dedicated to caribou. These things should signal a significant step forward in precautionary forest management. Some of AWA concerns regarding the draft Standard include the lack of measures which would trigger a revocation of FSC Certification in areas where logging is unsustainable such as Alberta's southwestern Eastern Slopes Forests, the promotion of salvage logging, and missing checks and balances to determine when forest stands in caribou habitat have recovered. Despite these problems, it is evident that FSC Canada intends to have a strong National Standard. There is still a lot of work to do in order to ensure that this Standard is as progressive as possible and provides reasonable management of our forests and species at risk. AWA will also continue to question the FSC process and encourages them to maintain a high standard of forestry excellence in order for companies to receive certification.

Representing the Environmental Chamber, Cliff Wallis serves on the Forest Stewardship Council (Canada's Standard Development Group) working on developing the new forest standard for Canada. He also serves on FSC's Transition Leadership Team. Topics of most interest and concern in the latest standard revision include working towards a landscape level approach to forest management and conservation and incorporating FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) for aboriginal peoples. Significant additions to the new standard include IFLs (Intact Forest Landscapes) and ICLs (Intact Cultural Landscapes) as well as more detailed guidance on woodland caribou.

In November 2015 and March 2016, AWA participated in science workshops hosted by Alberta Agriculture and Forestry on watersheds and wet areas mapping and encouraged continued application of scientific research and biodiversity principles to Alberta Forestry. In March 2016, AWA supported the government's proposal to move to a 10% mandatory structure retention directive and AWA was pleased to be the ENGO speaker in the March 2016 science workshop hosted by Agriculture and Forestry on forestry and biodiversity.

## ENERGY

### Alberta Energy Regulator's Play-Based Regulation (PBR) Pilot Project

In September 2015, the AER launched a PBR pilot in the Fox Creek area to test a new approach to the regulation of unconventional oil and gas development. The pilot tested a single integrated application

that allows energy companies to submit one application for all activities under an energy development project, instead of submitting separate applications for each activity.

AWA is a strong leader among the ENGO community to hold the AER's promise that cumulative impacts of play-based regulation would be managed. Problematic impacts to land, water, and wildlife as well as safety need to be resolved before projects are approved. While there has been some progress, there is more to do, especially in vulnerable headwaters areas where erosion risks are high. AWA is working closely with other ENGOs to ensure range plans under federal woodland caribou ranges and strategy in boreal and mountain caribou ranges comply with SARA requirements, especially with respect to habitat protection.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan was a historic announcement by the Alberta government to respond to climate change by putting a price on carbon pollution and set emissions limits for oil sands developments. With this comes the need and demand for more renewable energy projects, and the potential for new renewable projects to create new disturbances. AWA remains concerned about any development that disturbs native habitat such as native prairie. This year, a wind farm was proposed near Jenner, within AWA's Red Deer River Valley Area of Concern. AWA is monitoring the project and hopes good decisions are made such as avoiding damage to native prairie and endangered species. However, because the project is on private land, AWA is not considered directly and adversely affected and could not participate in a hearing if one were to occur.

## COAL

The GoA announced a plan to phase out emissions from coal-fired electricity generation by 2030 under the Climate Leadership Plan. The plan states that Alberta will diversify the electricity supply mix by replacing up to two thirds of retiring coal capacity with renewable energy (see "Renewable Energy") and one third with natural gas. It's an enormous task as 43% of Alberta's total generation capacity is produced by coal, but one necessary in the steps to prevent worsening climate change. AWA continues to oppose coal projects that threaten to whittle away at Alberta's wilderness or compromise ecological value.

## GRASSY MOUNTAIN

Benga Mining Limited, a subsidiary of the Australian company Riversdale Resources, is proposing to develop and operate an open-pit metallurgical coal mine approximately seven kilometres north of Blairmore in the Crowsnest Pass. The project is expected to last 25 years. A loose coalition formed last year, the 'Friends of Grassy Mountain', to share information and raise awareness about the risks of re-opening a mine. AWA successfully applied for participant funding with the some of the 'Friends' that are directly affected, called the Coalition of AWA and Grassy Mountain Group, and will participate should the project go to hearing.

At the end of October 2015, Riversdale Resources addressed an audience in Bellevue about the project. Concerns were raised from the community about impacts such as the economic impacts, and the potential for water and air contamination. In November, a critical habitat order for threatened westslope cutthroat trout prohibited the destruction of the trout's habitat. The Blairmore and Gold Creek watersheds contain pure stream westslope cutthroat trout, and may be affected by the Grassy Mountain Project if it goes ahead. AWA celebrated the habitat order and is watching carefully to see if

“mitigation” and “offset” measures will violate the Species at Risk Act and ultimately harm fish populations.

On January 25, 2016, the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) informed Riversdale Resources that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was incomplete. This puts a halt on the review process until deficiencies are addressed. The EIA resubmission is set for the end of this summer. Meanwhile, recent evidence of water contamination in nearby springs have caused locals to question the impact on a re-opened mine on water security in the community and downstream.

## GRIZZLY BEARS



Bears like these need our protection – *Christyann Olson*

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.

Increasing mortality rates of grizzlies in Alberta reflect the failure of current human-conflict management strategies. Numbers released by Alberta Environment and Parks in January of 2015 indicate that 28 known grizzly deaths occurred in 2015 – 24 by human-related causes. That number of mortalities in a single year is very significant, especially from a total provincial population of only around 700 animals.

The 2008 Grizzly Bear 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 decided to undertake a complete rewrite. On June 1, 2016, the GoA finally released its draft revised Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. While AWA appreciates the release of this long overdue document, AWA is generally concerned that that this Recovery Plan does not reflect a Precautionary Principle in wildlife management and may put this iconic species further at risk.

Some of AWA's major concerns include:



- The draft Recovery Plan has proposed an increase in acceptable mortality rate objectives in Bear Management Area (BMAs) 5 and 6 to “less than 6.0%, of which the female mortality does not exceed 1.8 %.” AWA strongly opposes the changed mortality rate objectives in BMAs 5 and 6. There is no scientific basis for increasing what are considered to be acceptable mortality rates in these areas. By allowing higher mortality in these BMAs, a large proportion of the Alberta population of grizzlies is placed at greater risk. With proper attractant management and aversive conditioning, the rates of grizzly death in these BMAs will decrease significantly.
- The draft Recovery Plan has removed Core and Secondary Zones in the Porcupine Hills and designated them as a “Support Zone” in BMA 5. This means that there will no longer be a requirement to manage road density or limit mortalities in the area. We strongly believe this change in designation has the potential to increase mortality rates and increase relocation by the animals away from the vital grizzly habitat in the Porcupine Hills.
- The draft Recovery plan has changed from Open Route to Open Road Density thresholds. Since thresholds are now only applied to “access that is reasonably drivable with on-highway vehicles”, there is potential for an increase in the proliferation of disturbances in Alberta which already far exceed any acceptable limits for wildlife. There is robust scientific evidence to show that habitat disturbance decreases grizzly bear survival by increasing human-grizzly conflict; and that habitat loss and displacement are major factors resulting in deaths. ALL disturbances (not just roads suitable for on-highway vehicles) must be considered open and consistently accessed by humans. OHV use on designated/undesignated trails results in increased access into grizzly bear habitat, increasing indirect and direct human-caused grizzly mortality and decreasing grizzly recovery.
- Poaching was identified in the strategy as the major cause of human-caused grizzly mortality. Poachers can and probably do take advantage of hundreds of kilometers of abandoned seismic lines and OHV trails (designated and undesignated) in order to access grizzly habitat. AWA questions how grizzly bear deaths from poaching will be reduced while the strategy does nothing to limit designated/undesignated trails and human disturbance through motorized access.

AWA believes that the draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan must apply the Precautionary Principle to reduce disturbances and human access into grizzly habitat before there can be a viable population in Alberta. AWA will continue working to ensure that Alberta has a credible grizzly bear recovery plan that is enforced throughout Alberta. AWA will also continue to campaign for the need for the legislated protection of core grizzly habitat and restriction of human access into grizzly habitat. Comprehensive and well-funded Bearsmart program, as well as well funded programs to educate land owners and hunters are also vital.

## CARIBOU

AWA’s vision is for self-sustaining Alberta woodland caribou populations; essentially the same goal espoused by Alberta’s Cabinet-approved woodland caribou policy and federal woodland caribou recovery strategies under the *Species at Risk Act*. And yet, Alberta’s caribou populations continue to decline as a result of minimal government action to protect caribou habitat. AWA’s recent work has focused on working for strong habitat-focused Alberta caribou range plans required no later than 2017 under the federal *Species at Risk Act*.

AWA engaged regularly through the year with the GoA repeatedly emphasizing the importance of strong habitat-focused caribou range plans. AWA has voiced recommendations for both the Little Smoky herd specifically, but also for general principles that apply to all caribou herds in Alberta. These high-priority recommendations include formally deferring new energy leasing in all caribou ranges and in buffer zones for small caribou ranges, providing interim direction to AER to require immediate compensatory habitat restoration for all activities in caribou range, deferring logging within caribou ranges, and ensuring protected areas in each caribou range.

## GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

AWA continued to work with local ranchers to secure the long-term future of these lands for Greater Sage-grouse and the dozens of other federally and provincially listed species that use these precious grassland habitats. This involved bringing national conservation organizations into discussions as well as seeking out new funding opportunities.

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 discussion with all those involved. That is both listening and contributing. We believe field days and opportunities to learn from each other will be the main requirement for success with 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 on conservation projects with ranchers in southwestern Alberta and some areas in southeastern Alberta but progress 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.

## BLACK BEARS

During 2016 Alberta Environment and Parks released the draft management plan for black bears in Alberta. AWA provided feedback, asking for increased funding for the Alberta Bearsmart Programs, more specific measures for reducing bear attractants, and implementing mandatory reporting of non-license harvest on private land. AWA requested an immediate end to the outdated and unethical practice of baiting for black bear hunting. Black bears are abundant in Alberta, but AWA remains concerned that they may be poorly managed in some regions, and more transparent and scientific data is required to track mortality and incidences of human-bear conflicts. Black bears made the news after the Fort McMurray wildfire when some animals moved into unoccupied residences to scavenge. As the adage goes, “a fed bear is a dead bear”, and wildlife officers were forced to kill at least 8 of the 17 black bears captured after the fire. Officials noted the number of bears captured had not increased since previous years.

## WOLVES

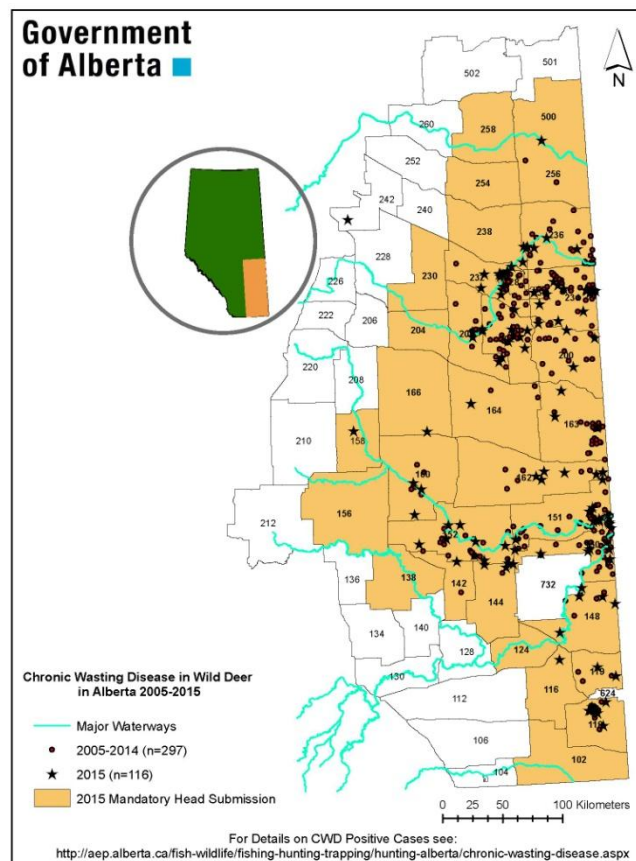
As top predators, wolves play a valuable role in keeping wild ecosystems healthy. AWA's goal is for the provincial government to take responsibility for managing Alberta's wolves in a science-based, responsible and transparent manner. AWA raised concerns about snaring and bounties and have been a voice for measured, effective, and humane approaches to wolf management. Specifically, the extent and impacts of both bounties and snaring on wolves and other animals are a concern. AWA will only support a carnivore management review that recognizes science, ethics, and best practices for future wolf management.

## 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 in Saskatchewan. Chronic wasting disease (CWD), the pervasive, unstoppable prion disease, had spread from game farms to the wild by 1996.

The 2015 Government of Alberta Fall Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Results tested for CWD in 4,929 submitted heads, 116 of which tested positive for the disease. This is further broken down by species: 105 mule deer, 11 white-tailed deer, and 0 heads of submitted elk and moose testing positive for the disease.

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. In the 2015/16 sample, 6 new Wildlife Management Units were identified to have CWD where the disease was previously not known to occur. These Wildlife Management Units are 116 (SE), 158, 166, 238 and 242 in Eastern-



Central Alberta, and 500 (NE). Wildlife management unit 242 is approximately 100 km further west than previously known cases, and is about 30km SE of Edmonton. The GoA currently considers this to be an outlier case, however, it is indicative of just how far the disease will continue to spread since its identification in the wild in 1996.

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. Some additional concerns include 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.

As of 2015, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has declared the situation “out of control” in Alberta and Saskatchewan and apparently has pulled back from further attempts at eradication. Although it can be objectively said that the situation is in fact "out of control", stopping any efforts at eradication is an irresponsible decision. Professionally handled eradication that removes entire bodies and disposes entirely of any that indicate CWD must be implemented. Culling of CWD-infected animals must also be encouraged by natural means. This requires redeveloping natural predator/prey relationships in infected areas. It would include reintroducing wolves into areas where they historically existed. This could remove infected animals at far less cost and possibly greater efficiency than through expensive culling programs. To conclude, AWA maintains that immediate actions must be taken to prevent further spread of this epidemic before the potential risk of CWD spreading to humans.

## 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 final report of the AFHA "Alberta’s Feral Horses: Informing an Integrated Management Approach" was published in September of 2015. The report notes that Sundre hosts the largest feral horse population on the Eastern Slopes despite efforts to control the population in the area. The capture program will continue to be the primary approach through which populations are managed. There will also be pilot projects relating to the effectiveness of contraception programs.

## 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 proposals that could likely negatively impact native fish species. We continue to be opposed to the surface coal mine proposal in the Crowsnest Pass that could have severe impacts on nearby creeks home to threatened (and federally protected) westslope cutthroat trout. A number of land use decisions, such as the announcement to designate parks in the Castle, must be reviewed in light of the Critical Habitat Order recently issued for westslope cutthroat trout in order to ensure their critical habitat is adequately protected. See *Westslope Cutthroat Trout* section for more details.

AWA has also written in support of the proposed listing of Saskatchewan-Nelson Rivers Bull Trout Population as Threatened and Athabasca Rainbow Trout as Endangered under the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*. See *Other Species at Risk* for more information.



Livingstone River Westslope Cutthroat Trout

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# GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

## PUBLIC LANDS

Public lands issues have been an ongoing priority of AWA since the organization was founded. A comprehensive and publicly developed public lands policy is desperately needed in Alberta and yet the departments responsible display no sense of urgency. A comprehensive publicly developed policy needs to address access issues, sales and transfers, surface rights compensation from oil and gas to grazing lessees, and conservation. 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.

An Auditor General Report published July 2015 estimated that "Albertans [are] forgoing over \$25 million in access fees currently paid to leaseholders." The report was critical of the GoA, noting that it does not track lease transfers or the value of leases and has no objectives for the benefits of grazing leases. AWA has been, and will continue, pressing the government to follow up on the Auditor General's recommendations.

Access issues into public lands with a grazing lease disposition continue to worsen. A number of grazing leaseholders have prevented the public from accessing the leased land for recreational purposes. The restrictions appear to be enabled by the Recreational Access Regulation, which was enacted in 2003 under the Public Lands Act. The regulation expires March 2017 and AWA is currently working to advocate for a public lands policy that would in part address this issue.

## TAX-RECOVERY LANDS

Despite enormous public opposition to behind-closed-doors sales of public lands the GoA continues to dispose of public land with no opportunity for any form of public input. AWA, Alberta Native Plant Council and Nature Alberta collaborated and published in 2011 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, no response was ever received. The program beginning 2011 of the sale of tax recovery lands is currently occurring and is expected to be completed spring 2017."

## PROTECTED AREAS - PROVINCIAL

The Land Use Framework, discussed later in this report is at present 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

AWA continues to express concern over commercialization of the National Parks. The new Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (as of the October 2015 federal election) was given the mandate to “Protect our National Parks by limiting development within them, and where possible, work with nearby communities to help grow local eco-tourism industries and create jobs.” Despite this mandate, however, in July 2015 changes to the Site Guidelines for the Lake Louise Ski Area in Banff National Park were approved, 12 out of 13 development proposals await agency consideration in the endangered caribou range at Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park, and \$66 million was announced for a trail in Jasper while scientific monitoring and interpretive programs remain comparatively underfunded.

Visitor numbers have been at their maximum this year, even causing visitors to be turned away by enforcement officers from Lake Louise due to public safety concerns during the July long weekend. The parks will undoubtedly experience increased visitor numbers during free visitation in 2017. How Parks Canada will continue to provide for conservation objectives while our parks are being “loved to death” is unclear. AWA works with regional organizations and colleagues in the National Parks to push for processes and policy directions that are transparent, recognizes conservation goals, and prioritizes ecological integrity.

## 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 in the planning process.

### LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN (LARP)

AWA continues to attend participation opportunities, urging subregional plan development including the implementation of crucial land disturbance limits, which as of yet are forthcoming.

### SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (SSRP)

AWA’s focus this year was to provide input on the continued land-use planning processes in the SSRP. The Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Linear Footprint Management Plan (LFMP) and Recreation Management Plan (RMP) were priorities of the SSRP (see ‘Livingstone-Porcupine’). The LFMP is still in draft form and is expected to be released in the Fall, following the completion of the Biodiversity

Management Framework (BMF) and concluded consultations. AWA believes the plans should establish strict limits on land use and linear densities within the Livingstone and Porcupine, as well as the South Saskatchewan Region broadly, in order to meet conservation targets.

## NORTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (NSRP)

Work on the NSRP was started in 2014. 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 was hoped that this would occur early in fall 2015 and a draft version of the plan released within the year. However, the RAC advice has yet to be released as of August 2016, and no draft is to be seen. It is expected that the release of the RAC advice will be imminent, but the timeline for the draft NSRP is unknown.

AWA has been actively involved, with AWA staff, board members and volunteers attending more than half the Phase I consultation sessions. AWA continues to have discussions with government members in support of increasing the network of protected areas in the North Saskatchewan, and expects to be heavily involved in providing feedback and engaging members in upcoming drafts of the NSRP.

## FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING REGIONS

The next planning processes to commence are expected to be the Upper Peace Regional Plan (UPRP) and Upper Athabasca Regional Plan (UARP).

In anticipation of the start of these future planning processes, AWA collaborated with other ENGOs and academics under the title of the *Northern Alberta Conservation Areas Working Group*. The goal of the working group was to draft a set of science-based maps and proposals for the layout of future conservation areas that would feed into the future planning processes for those LUF regions. It was also hoped the working group proposal might form the core of a suite of public documents, usable as education and communication tools related to wild species and wilderness conservation in northern Alberta. AWA worked with the group and in the end did not agree with the results of the modeling. It did not show areas AWA knows to be of importance in these regions and in need of protection. AWA plans to expand some areas of our Wild Spaces Map but we cannot endorse the map the group developed as being representative of the important areas to be conserved. AWA did however develop an info-graphic representation of the group's findings that showed important Foothills and Boreal landscapes in the northwest part 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), and in summer 2016 to the green zone. The policy’s offset framework is based on a complex functional assessment approach which AWA believes will unfortunately facilitate ongoing wetland destruction.

AWA continues as a vigorous advocate for stronger stewardship for our wetlands.

AWA has been an ENGO delegate to the federal-provincial oil sands monitoring program (JOSM) since 2013, with this year’s effort spent in urging a faster start-up of a wetlands monitoring program, which remains a key missing piece to monitor hydrological impacts on peat lands with multiple linear disturbance from industry. Linear fragmentation dries out peat wetlands, impacting the wetlands themselves and also the surrounding forest’s ability to buffer fire and drought.

## 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.

AWA, with teams including other conservation sector members, supported conservation goals and work towards a Water for Life implementation review and lake watershed management planning. In the Fall of 2015, the government published an action plan around water conservation consultation. AWA was concerned about the rollback of broader commitments to healthy aquatic ecosystems. In the Bow River basin, AWA continues to encourage flood recovery work that focuses on enhancing ecological health.

## 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.

The Biodiversity Strategy remains an important unfinished piece to inform land use policy. International commitments to maintain and restore biodiversity are required at both a provincial and subregional level.

## SPECIES AT RISK

AWA is actively involved in providing feedback and recommendations for Alberta's species at risk, whether they are provincially or federally designated. Federal legislation provides stronger measures of protection than Alberta's *Wildlife Act*, so when urgent action is needed, AWA pushes for a more comprehensive provincial policy and legislation, and for the federal plans to be as strong as possible.

In January, AWA sent a letter to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change with seven other ENGOs, including the David Suzuki Foundation and Canadian Wildlife Federation, requesting a meeting to discuss the future of Canada's endangered species, including boreal caribou protection. Under the Species at Risk Act, one or more action plans must be created for a listed species under a certain timeline.

## 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.

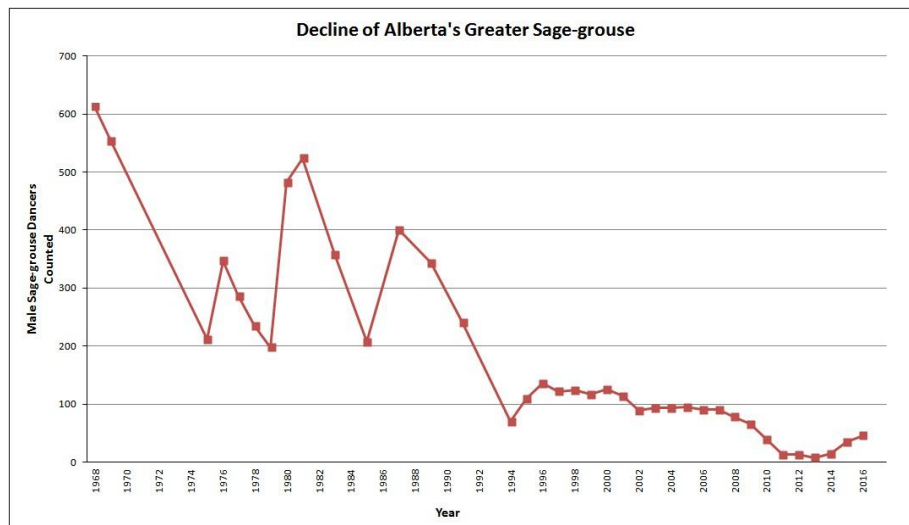
## GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

Canada's endangered Greater Sage-grouse populations continued to grow again this year. AWA remains 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 constant pressure by AWA and others and related court action. 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. The population will require continued protection and active management by the provincial government to build numbers to safe levels.

The Emergency Protection 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. 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.

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.



The entire 2016 Canadian population of sage-grouse has improved and is estimated to be 340 birds including 38 females imported from Montana in the spring of 2016. In 1996 the estimate was 777 and in 2014 the estimate was 100 birds. Alberta's 2016 spring count included 46 males on 3 leks (display grounds), one formerly active Alberta lek had no recorded males. In 2013 only 8 males were counted, in 2014, just 14 males and in 2015 there were 35 on leks. The 2016 the Saskatchewan count had only 2 active leks both found in Grasslands National Park and 33 males were counted, up from 18 males in 2012.

## WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT

Westslope cutthroat trout has been a high priority in the last year for AWA conservation efforts. After repeated unsuccessful requests for the previous Minister to issue a critical habitat order as required by the Species at Risk Act, AWA and the Timberwolf Wilderness Society filed an application on September 18, 2015 in Federal Court. The application seeks an order from the court directing the Minister to issue a

critical habitat order under section 58 of the Species at Risk Act for the Alberta population of westslope cutthroat trout.

A critical habitat order was issued for the westslope cutthroat trout, Alberta populations, on December 2, 2015 by the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans under section 58 of the Species at Risk Act (Canada). This engages section 58(1) of SARA prohibiting a person from destroying the functions, features and attributes of all critical habitat identified in the Order. Penalties include fines of up to \$1,000,000 or imprisonment up to 5 years.

AWA believes that, now Alberta's westslope cutthroat trout is provincially and federally designated as threatened, a recovery plan developed, and a critical habitat order issued, protection and restoration of this species and its habitat must be effectively implemented. AWA's is working to ensure that recovery of the species is more than just a paper exercise; it will require significant changes to the way Alberta's headwaters are managed. Forest management practices, management of motorized recreation, and protection of critical habitat all need to be greatly improved if this species has a chance of recovering. Permanent closure of all vehicle trails and roads that have damaged, are damaging, or threaten to damage, westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat is necessary to adhere to the westslope cutthroat trout recovery strategy and critical habitat protection order. No new development (e.g. roads, trails, transmission lines, pipelines, well sites, buildings, fences, bridges) should be allowed in areas that may damage critical habitat.

## 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.

The draft Recovery Strategy for the Wood Bison was released this spring. COSEWIC's last assessment recommended that wood bison be down listed under SARA to 'special concern' from 'threatened' and AWA does not support this change. The draft recovery strategy has promising direction, however, no critical habitat was identified due to the complexity, with a timeline to determine critical habitat by 2021. AWA is encouraged that the Ronald Lake bison herd's status in Alberta has changed to become a Subject Animal, meaning it is protected as wildlife. The Ronald Lake herd is known to be disease free. The Wabasca herd is also known to be disease free, but is not protected as wildlife and with only 30-40 individuals remaining, is at serious risk of extirpation unless protection is ensured. AWA believes the recovery of wood bison is possible with legislative change, the development of strong action plans, and the designation of critical habitat. Wood bison in Alberta status down listing is pending and Plains bison in Alberta status down listing is also pending.

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. Following the Buffalo Treaty anniversary in Banff at the American Bison Society conference, the gathering of First Nations passed a resolution calling on Premier Rachel Notley to change the status

of plains bison to wildlife. AWA is hoping this treaty, as well as the reintroduction of plains bison into Banff National Park will enable this government to have a conservation mindset and move this government toward designating plains bison as wildlife.

Concerns remain about the reintroduction of plains bison into Banff National Park. The project will welcome a herd of 30 to 50 bison by January 2017 to the Panther and Dormer rivers north of Banff. AWA supports the reintroduction of extirpated species, but there are concerns about the reintroduction project, namely, the impacts of fencing, potential for commercialization of the bison herd, and lack of space. There are concern the fencing may impact other wildlife – any fencing required for wild bison management must be minimal and “wildlife friendly”. A paper released this year estimated Banff National Park could support up to 1,000 bison, but how Parks Canada will manage potential escapees remains to be disclosed to the public. AWA is calling for a management plan for escaped bison as well as a commitment to keep out roads and other incursions into the area that might attract tourists into this wilderness area.

## 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. When the opportunity arises, AWA provides comments on proposed documents open for public consultation by SARA.

Under the Species at Risk Act, one or more action plans must be created for a listed species under a certain timeline. Parks Canada is approaching the requirement by creating multi-species action plans for each Park. AWA provided comment on such a plan for Jasper National Park, which included seven species: Common Nighthawk and Olive-sided Flycatcher (birds), Haller’s Apple Moss, Little Brown Myotis and Northern Myotis (bats), Whitebark Pine, and Woodland Caribou.

Athabasca Rainbow Trout are currently being considered for an Endangered listing under SARA. AWA wrote in support of COSEWIC's status assessment of the species as endangered and urged the government to list the species as Endangered, followed by swift development of a recovery strategy and legal protection of its critical habitat. In July of 2015, AWA submitted similar comments in support of bull trout, currently considered for a Threatened listing.

# PROTECTED AREAS PROGRESS

## ALBERTA'S PROVINCIALY 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 the number and area of provincially protected areas.

New protected areas created through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan do not appear in the data set as they are still pending approval and they are listed at the bottom of the table. Section 7 land is a classification describing designation of lands to be managed under the Act that are not yet established as parks or recreation areas.

<http://www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/library/land-reference-manual.aspx> is the source of the following data.

	Number	Number	Number	Hectares	Hectares	Hectares
Name	2016	2015	2014	2016	2015	2014
Wilderness Areas	3	3	3	100,988.79	100,988.79	100,988.79
Ecological Reserves	15	15	15	26,843.34	26,843.34	26,843.34
Wildland Provincial Parks	32	32	32	1,731,439.59	1,731,439.59	1,731,439.59
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	1	1	459,671.04	459,671.04	459,671.04
Provincial Parks	76	76	75	221,363.92	221,363.92	220,987.19
Provincial Recreation Areas	208	208	208	87,891.58	87,891.58	87,891.58
Heritage Rangelands	2	2	2	12,010.47	12,010.47	12,010.47
Natural Areas	139	139	139	129,943.98	129,943.98	129,943.98
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>2,770,152.71</b>	<b>2,770,152.71</b>	<b>2,769,775.98</b>
Section 7 Land	10			1450.51	1450.51	1450.51
LARP Commitments not enacted	4	4	4	1,239,233	1,239,233	1,239,233
SSRP Commitments not enacted	3	3		137,735	137,735	

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# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

## 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. The TGCI has recently been revitalized and AWA continues to 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 2016 AWA attended the Northern Plains Conservation Network's biannual meeting in Bozeman, Montana. 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.

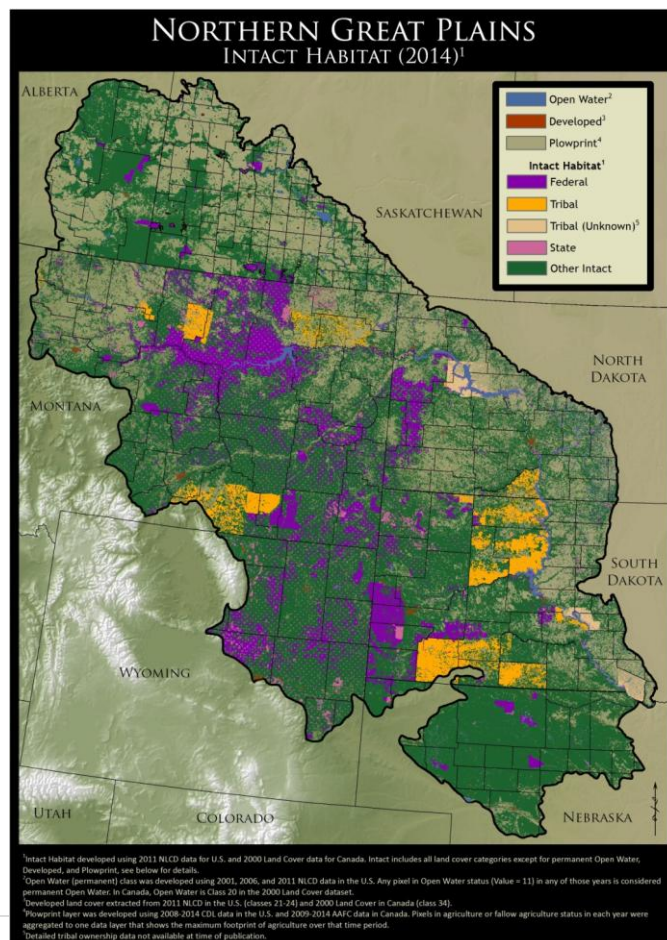
At 424 million acres, the Great Plains is likely the largest grassland ecosystem in North America and one of the largest in the world. The vision is to establish a sea of grass to support healthy wildlife populations and vibrant communities of people. NPCN believes that broad-scale restoration of this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

Twelve 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.

In addition to communicating on a wide range of grassland conservation issues, NPCN members currently contribute to two main foci – 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. 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 and Canada move forward with actions to protect this species throughout western North America. Working with other NPCN members, helped retain federal ownership of the Govenlock PFRA Pasture in SW Saskatchewan. NPCN participants are working to get National Wildlife Area designation of this pasture and long-term protection for other PFRA pastures that are in the process of being transferred back to Saskatchewan administration.

NPCN continues to champion protection and appropriate management of the Onefour Research Station lands in SE Alberta and to underscore that there has been no consultation with the conservation community about the transfer of ownership from the federal government to the GoA. These grasslands are some of the most extensive and diverse on the northern glaciated plains and – they are home to dozens of federally and provincially listed species of concern.





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## 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 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 Saloon.

## OUTREACH

### 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. 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 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

AWA is contracting the services of Build Studio, a professional web development company with usability expertise, to provide support and maintenance for its public interface. A significant revamp was completed in the fall of 2015. 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. AWA adheres to the Canadian Anti Spam Legislation.

AWA has two primary websites:

[www.AlbertaWilderness.ca](http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca) (major information and resource site)

[www.ClimbforWilderness.ca](http://www.ClimbforWilderness.ca) (Earth Day event site)

and two single issue websites:

[www.SavetheGrizzlies.ca](http://www.SavetheGrizzlies.ca)

[www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com](http://www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com)

The three main list serve newsletters are:

General AWA News and Events 1512 addresses on this list (2015 -1310)

Media News 208 outlets on this list (2015 -95)

Wilderness & Wildlife Defenders (folks who will take action, write letters, respond to issues; 617 (2015 - 613)

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

Climb for Wilderness (1015 addresses)

Wild West Saloon (356 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 year, alerts and information are sent out, often asking defenders to make a call or write a letter to help increase awareness. AWA regularly receives many copies of letters and emails sent by participants as part of this program.

## HIKES AND TALKS PROGRAM

AWA's hikes are a strong program that continues to meet success in introducing the public to the natural beauty of wilderness areas, and helping fulfill the awareness aspect of AWA's mission. The hikes program is an important part of outreach 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 and engaging hikers 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 with excellent presentations creating opportunity to learn more about AWA's work and discuss a broad range of environmental topics throughout the province.

With the support of the Wildbird General Store and Jackson Power, AWA hosted our second annual Wilderness around the World Speaker Series. We broadened our member base and plan to launch another series for fall 2016.

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 eighth 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 2015-2016 season were very successful and often sold out. They offer an excellent venue for spreading conservation awareness.

## SUMMER WILDERNESS DEFENDERS KIDS' CAMP

AWA's Wilderness Defenders Kids Camp program was success for its second year, educating and instilling a love of nature 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. Field trips to Weaselhead Park and Cochrane Ecological Institute allowed the children to experience firsthand the complexities and beauty of natural landscapes and to share these experiences with their peers. They learnt the difference between native and non-native species and how humans have impacted native prairies. The children spent most days outside, being active and learning about being healthy, active and aware of a healthy environment. Each child prepared a project 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 with 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 23, 2016. It is an outstanding event, held to increase public awareness of wilderness, wildlife and wild water in Alberta. The 25th *Climb and Run for Wilderness* attracted participants from 2 to 100 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 race attracted athletes from across Canada, United States and as far away as Sweden. This elite event was the only event in Canada to be recognized and 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. Donations and corporate support for the event were noticeably decreased this year. The economic downturn related to the oil and gas sector in Calgary was felt and income was similar to 2015 when the downturn first impacted this event. Expenses increased and net proceeds were less than hoped for. Conservation groups and vendors set up displays throughout the Calgary Tower mall for the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Wild Alberta Expo to help participants learn about the work of exhibitions and 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 14 years, held a Mural Painting Competition that has produced an amazing gallery of murals on the walls of the stairwell. With more than 175 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. The Calgary Tower has embraced the gallery and will leave the paintings in place.

We made a significant advance in our registration process this year, and have essentially achieved online registration for all participants. The transition to paperless registration and receipting processes for this event has been important. 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. The commercial service was not without problems however and we are seeking other options for the coming fiscal year.

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. After holding the event at the Calgary Tower for the past 25 years, AWA has decided to move the event in 2017 to the Bow Building, currently Calgary's tallest building.

## HILLHURST COTTAGE SCHOOL

We were pleased to have support from the Alberta Historic Resources Foundation and the Canada 150 Infrastructure programs this year. We upgraded both furnaces (Springs Heating) and related ductwork, restored the hardwood flooring (Edge Flooring), repaired plumbing issues (Acclaim Plumbing) and replaced and repaired two exterior staircases (Chalmers Heritage Conservation Ltd). A hail storm in August of 2015 left the exterior paint in damaged condition and with the support of our insurance the exterior was repainted by United Paint and Decorating who did an excellent restoration job.

## COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

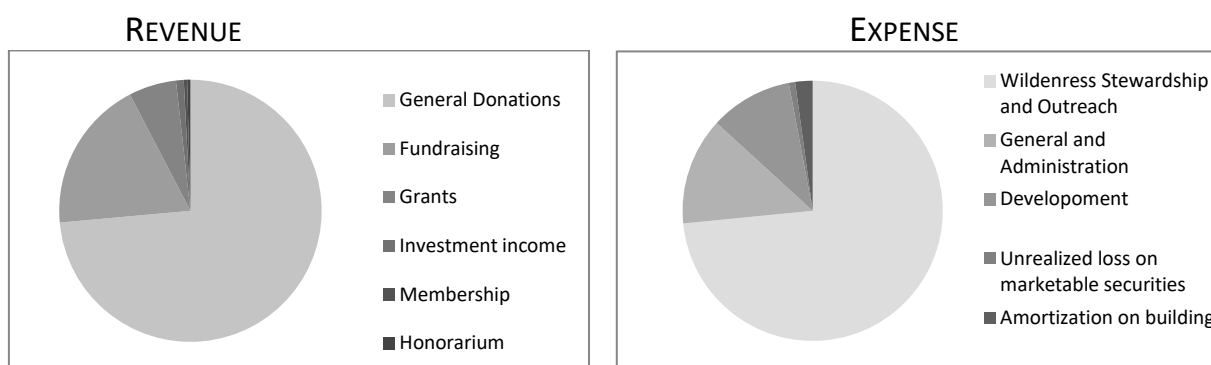
Throughout the year, AWA participated in a wide range of community events, including conferences, workshops and talks. Examples include participation at various ENGO AGMs, such as those for the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance; attendance at Bow River, Red Deer River and other watershed alliance planning meetings; participation in Southern Foothills community meetings, presentations to school groups, various community groups, and more. AWA was active in the wider community, putting up displays at markets and specialized events. AWA also hosted a student practicum for a student from SAIT and completed numerous student requests for information and assistance. All of these events and activities are important outreach opportunities to engage with the community and raise awareness.



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

# FINANCING WILDERNESS PROTECTION

Funds received from donations by members, supporters and fundraising are vital to the health of AWA and provided 92% of our total revenue. Granting agencies in this year included Alberta Government Recreation and Physical Activity Division and ECO Canada. Funding generated through events came from our annual Earth Day event Climb and Run for Wilderness, and the Wild West Gala in the fall. Shell Canada, Enbridge Inc, Imperial Oil and Ghostpine Environmental Services provided sponsorship for our Wild West Gala. Fundraising and gifts from donors allow AWA to be financially independent and free to speak out for wilderness protection. We continue to work on our target to strengthen our financial reserve.



AWA devoted 73% of its cash 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 also includes the cost of seeking more members and supporters as well as applying for grants. General and Administrative costs of 13% represent an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism.

Our voting membership has grown in the past year and stands at 5,342 (2015 - 4,756) individuals; representing 214 (2015 - 206) communities in Alberta, in addition to national and international members. We recognize a need for ongoing membership development and creating a larger donor base.

## 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. AWA’s complete financial statements are posted on our website.

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# 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  
Ruth Mowat 2016

## 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 and they are called Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors.

### WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE BENEFACTORS

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

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  
Diane and Kevin Mihalcheon  
Anthony and Liz Fricke  
Donna Hammerlindl

## 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 remember them here in our annual Report.

### DONATIONS IN MEMORIAM 2015-2016

P.K. Anderson 1927-2014	Kuma 2001-2016
Joseph Biegen 1924-2015	David Manzer
Gerald Brewin 1929-2016	Weslyn Mather 1945-2015
Roger Creasey	Ruth McPhee 1920-2016
Brent Dahl 1961-2016	Brian McWilliam 1957 - 2016
Ken Dalman 1939-2015	Delha Ng 1955-2015
Richard Dean	Adelle Peterson 1926-2015
Joyce Docken 1923 - 2016	Martha Reisenhofer 1932-2016
Larry Frith 1943-2016	Gail Sygutek 1942-2015
Bruce Greenwood 1931-2016	Kim Schoff 1957-2015
Vic Grossi 1957-2015	Knut Vik 1933 - 2016
Lorna Gunn 1947-2016	Hugh Wallace 1941-2016
Chris Havard 1944-2015	

## ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust is a permanent endowment fund for Alberta's wilderness and we envision it can become an integral part of wilderness for tomorrow. We hope that 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 help 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 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 \$25,269 (2015 - \$25,765). The endowment fund's annual distribution \$1,011 (2015 - \$1,064.00) is dedicated to the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture and the Wilderness Defender Awards.



## 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 2015 lecture was given by Sid Marty. Marty inspired a full house at Hillhurst Cottage School last November giving members and supporters a motivating and energized account of the protest and subsequent arrest while defending the forests of the Castle. An article recounting Sid's Lecture was published in the 2016 *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 Sid Marty and Gord Petersen.

Sid Marty is as iconically Albertan as the bull pines profiling rocky ridge tops in the south-west corner where he lives. Through poetry, songs and prose, he celebrates our ties to landscapes, wild critters and our colourful past. Sid claims that communing with wild places is restorative by slowing the pace of life, allowing us to live in the present moment and connect with “those old souls” that knew this land as long ago as 10,000 years. Sid is highly regarded and when he stands up, others learn from him and stand up too.

Standing as tall as the mountains around him, Gord Petersen gazes forward to a time when they will no longer need his voice calling for their protection. Gord was lured to the south-west corner of Alberta by its beauty and by the potential to restore it to its wilderness glory. He’s been a knowledgeable and tireless campaigner for the ideals of the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, an artful photographer and devoted advocate for sound land management throughout the Eastern Slopes. He hasn’t wavered in his beliefs and devotion to the wilderness as he walks softly and carries a mighty stick.

## 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. Bob Blaxley accepted our award in 2015.

Bob is quite simply an icon for the Whaleback. Years ago his book “Hiking in the Whaleback” began introducing folks to this enchanted landscape. With little fanfare, every year Bob takes two if not more groups of folks to see the Whaleback and to tell stories about how it came to be protected and what its natural features and landscapes mean. His quiet, untiring strength has helped many learn from him and his stories, whether on the Whaleback or in a classroom or in conversation.



Sid Marty accepting award form Richard Secord – *Kevin Mihalcheon*

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# HOPE FOR TOMORROW

*Above all is the absolute certainty that we care and  
we will take a stand and we will have  
hope for tomorrow  
because people care and  
know the sanctuary and peace found  
in wild spaces and wild things.*

*- Christyann Olson*



People who care,  
the sanctuary of Alberta's Wild Spaces,  
a band of sheep and a day of stewardship.

