

# A WILDLANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



AUGUST 2015

Getting Out There:  
From California's Sierras to  
Alberta's Rockies  
From Coyote Lake to  
the Badlands



# C O N T E N T S

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## Cover Photo

Alberta's newest fully protected provincial park – Antelope Hill – graces the August cover. This park wouldn't exist without the generosity of Gottlob Schmidt. Mr. Schmidt donated 380 hectares of native grasslands to make protection of this Environmentally Significant Area possible.

PHOTO: © C. WALLIS



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## Featured Artist: Jacquelyn Blight

Towering Rocky Mountains; vast, seemingly endless prairie; undulating, dynamic foothills; this spectacular Alberta scenery was, and still is, Jackie's inspiration. As a youngster she incorporated natural objects she found into crafts and artworks. Throughout the years her art works included folk art, specialty furniture finishes, faux finishes, and trompe l'oeil murals. Jackie developed an ability to create textures and finishes with multiple colors and multiple translucent layers of color. She taught these art forms and finishes for many years in Calgary and Black Diamond.

Throughout her lifetime Jackie has also been an avid photographer, capturing the beauty and uniqueness of her natural surroundings. She creates beautiful photo encaustics by fusing and layering photography, encaustics, (hot wax and hot colored wax), oil sticks, and pastels. The use of these materials together with digital manipulation at times creates a type of realistic impressionism and brings out nuances of light and detail the viewer rarely notices in real life. She hopes her photo encaustics will ignite or reignite in the viewer a passion and appreciation of nature, the vast and the minute.

Her encaustics are now showing at The Stop in Black Diamond, Alberta. See Jackie's other artworks at [jacquelynblight.ca](http://jacquelynblight.ca) or contact her at [jacquelynblight@gmail.com](mailto:jacquelynblight@gmail.com)

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*"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"*

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# Will We Let a Devil Roam the Castle?

Fist-pump, then furrowed brow – that's how I reacted to the provincial government's September 4, 2015 announcement that the Castle would be added to Alberta's provincial and wildland parks system. So many people – James Tweedie, Judy Huntley, Dave Sheppard and Gordon Petersen come immediately to mind – have campaigned tirelessly for years to extend genuine, meaningful protection to this special place. When the parks were announced Gordon told Global News how important a fully-protected Castle was to the health of Waterton National Park and the Crown of the Continent lands. So, after the fist pump, I thanked Premier Notley and Minister Shannon Phillips for what I thought they had done.

The furrowed brow? It's because of the details. Don't believe for one second that the announcement necessarily guarantees the level of protection we've sought. The province simply doesn't tell the truth when its news release trumpets: "Province to fully protect Castle area." Sorry...but simply turning the Castle into two Alberta parks doesn't come anywhere close to fully protecting this area. Look at the list of activities the province says it will allow in the Wildland Park and the Provincial Park. That list makes it abundantly clear that the government's promise of full protection is an illusion.

Is exploiting oil and gas consistent with full protection of the Castle? Apparently

so. The province plans to honour existing commitments in both Castle parks.

Will new oil and gas leases be granted in these parks? You bet. Sure there won't be any new surface access allowed but it also likely means the brakes will be applied to efforts to close and restore existing access routes in the parks.

Will off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles be allowed in both parks? Absolutely. They will be allowed not only on designated trails in both parks but also in whatever a "designated area" amounts to. Not even the previous government allowed OHVs in provincial parks (well, with the notorious exception of Lakeland).

How about cows? Will Bessie and Molly (our cover girls for the June issue) get to stretch out in the Castle alpine after munching and trampling some of that area's biodiversity? You bet. Existing grazing leases in both parks go unchallenged. Our friend ecological integrity might be even more offended by the province's statement that new grazing will be allowed in the Castle parks ("subject to grazing suitability assessment" – whatever that means).

Did you know that, under previous governments, hunting was prohibited as a rule in Alberta's provincial parks (the only exception to this was the elk cull in Cypress Hills Provincial Park)? The Notley government's Castle announcement opens

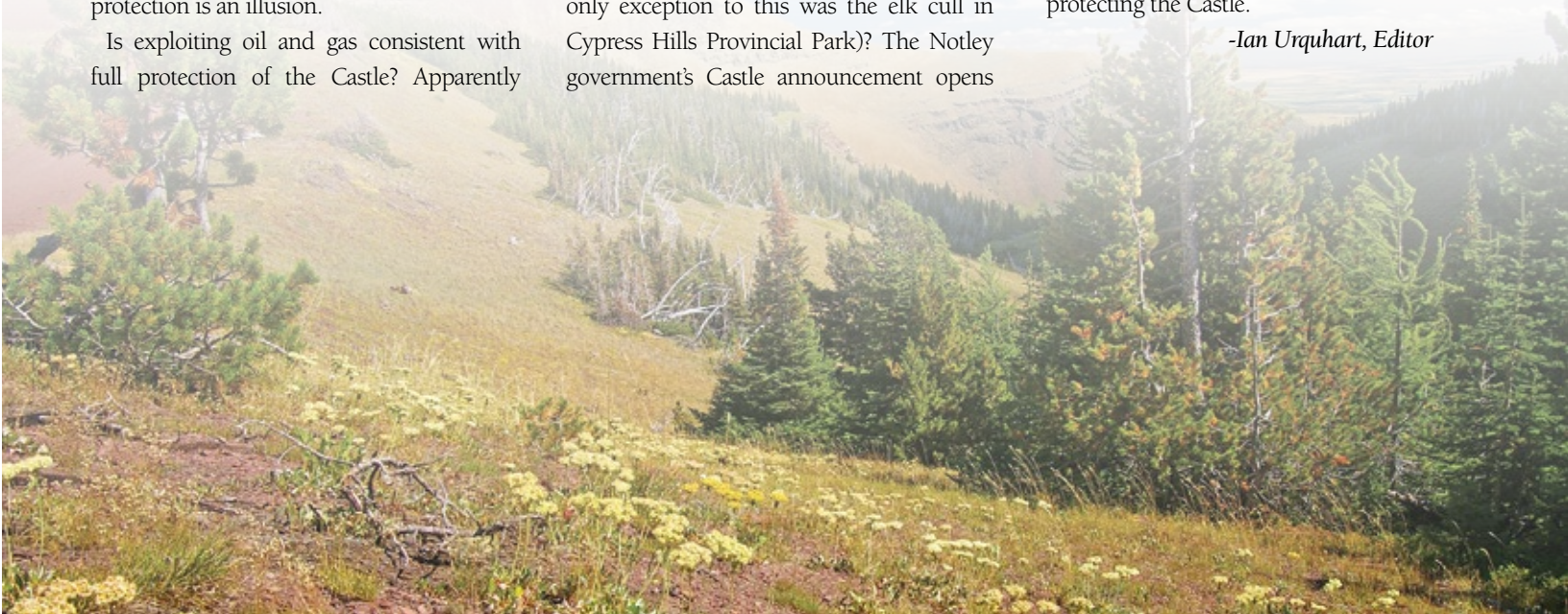
the door to hunting in another provincial park. Hunting will be allowed in the new provincial park. Unlike the case in Cypress Hills there's no ecological justification for this decision. It's absurd.

Those who write for this magazine and work for AWA on behalf of wild landscapes in Alberta have time and again documented the destruction that resource exploitation, cattle grazing, and OHV use do. If the above provisions stand they will suck much of the promise out of the decision to turn these special lands into parks.

There may still be time to ensure the promise of early September is realized. We are in the midst of a (unnecessarily brief) 30-day consultation period. We have until October 5, 2015 to make our concerns heard. Please...care enough about this special place to tell the government what needs to be done to "fully protect" it. No petroleum, no cattle, no OHVs, no hunting. Use the online form (<http://www.albertaparks.ca/consult>), send an email to [ParkNews@gov.ab.ca](mailto:ParkNews@gov.ab.ca), Minister Shannon Phillips ([AEP.Minister@gov.ab.ca](mailto:AEP.Minister@gov.ab.ca)), and Premier Notley ([premier@gov.ab.ca](mailto:premier@gov.ab.ca)).

Do it to ensure that fully protecting this area is more than just a spin doctor's headline; do it to finish well the work of James, Judy, Gordon, and the other enthusiasts of protecting the Castle.

*-Ian Urquhart, Editor*





# 4,200 Kilometres to Go:

## The First Leg on a Journey on the Pacific Crest Trail

By David Hockey



**T**he Pacific Crest Trail is a scenic trail created by the U.S. Congress in 1968. It stretches more than 4,200 kilometres through California, Oregon, and Washington from Mexico to Canada. This national scenic trail is touted as “one of the best trail experiences on earth” and as I made the decision to hike a good portion of it in the spring of 2014 I couldn’t help but hope that it would live up to its reputation. One of my favourite parts of hiking is the wildlife along the way; certainly by the time I completed the 1,800 km I planned to hike over two months I will have seen many. I started my hike on the border of the United States and Mexico. At that point in southern California you are confronted with the Sonoran desert: freezing cold overnight and scorching hot during the day. Given this climate, it is essential to be either nocturnal or an early riser.

My desert wildlife was limited to lots of ants, a couple of scorpions, one lonely looking rabbit and six rattlesnakes. The sound was unforgettable. That would be a reference to the first time I came around a bend on the trail and heard the warning rattle of a snake. In my experience a standoff usually occurs (with the snake having the advantage). On the one end of the standoff the snake wants to soak up as much heat as possible before the sun goes down; on the other side of the standoff you have an eager, sometimes desperate, hiker who wants to continue on the trail. You need to be patient. It usually took about 15 minutes before the snake let me pass.

The physical challenge of a hike is some-

thing I am always up for. Personally, it’s one of the most attractive aspects of hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. Most people hiking the trail will try to average 30 km a day in order to make it to the Canadian border before the snow ends their journey. Especially in the desert, when the distances between water sources can be long, it is crucial to make good timing. Hiking in the desert comes with the challenge of heat, sand and wind. A typical morning starts off at 5:30 and 5°C. As the day progresses the heat builds to over 40° and the winds pick up. I would describe the winds as gunshots; there are bursts so hard, that they would knock you right over and off the trail! Adding to the challenge, the sand slowly grinds away at your feet. Combined with the heat and distance this is a recipe for blisters that most of us have never experienced before.

As the section of desert on the Pacific Crest Trail fades away you start to enter what I regard as the “Promised Land.” For the next 1,100 km all the hikers along the trail talk about the High Sierras. The Sierras almost rise to mythical proportions as you are tired of walking in challenging desert. The promise of flowing water, rising snow capped peaks, never ending vistas, and no snakes – now that’s something I think everyone looks forward to! As you cross the threshold into the mountains and enter their forests you’re greeted by deer, lots of deer. There were sections of the trail in which the deer were so tame they would allow you to come so close enough you could hear them breathe. The deer would wander through your campsite on most evenings as you set up your tarp and made supper. Fur-

ther along the trail the trees gave way to the high alpine and who better to occupy that area than the marmots. They were cute, friendly, curious, and everywhere. I had never experienced so many at once. In fact, the day we camped below Mt. Whitney I counted over 50 of them scurrying around the grassy plateau.

By the time you reach the Sierras your feet should have toughened and your legs should be ready for the daily elevation gains. Each day entailed a long climb up to the top of a mountain pass and an afternoon descent – usually postholing for hours until you get out of the snow. The daily mileage through the Sierras may decrease partially because of terrain but also because the land is drop dead gorgeous. The views of high alpine lakes combined with bluebird skies are simply stunning and seeing them should be on every hiker’s bucket list.

I have left the best experience of my first year on the Trail for last; as it is the people you meet along the way that takes this hike from the usual walk in the woods to a world-class experience. There have been so many people that have been touched by this trail that they seem compelled to give back. They are referred to as “Trail Angels” and what they do is considered “Trail Magic.” They also have unusual names. Every hiker gets a trail name based off of something they have done on the trail. For example, if you were to fall quite frequently on the trail, your trail name could end up being “Stumbles.”

From the start of my journey in San Diego where “Scout” and “Frodo” picked

me up at the airport, let me stay in their home, cooked me dinner and breakfast, assisted me in getting groceries, in mailing packages up the trail and then driving me 1.5 hours to the border. The sheer joy of spending a hot and dry day in the desert only to discover a cooler filled with beer, pop, and chocolate bars with a simple note to “please enjoy on behalf of John boy” is indescribable. Even hitch hiking into town was made easy thanks to the kindness of strangers. Even though you look homeless and have not showered in 6 days someone can’t wait to pick you up, roll down the windows, and find out how your hike is going. Some would cross the

road to find a hiker and feed them with a car full of Subway sandwiches. Others like “Coppertone” traveled on roads paralleling the trail and handed out root beer floats. It was a rare day if some kind of trail magic did not happen.

I spend a great deal of my time working on the Great Divide Trail here in Alberta and B.C. As it runs 1,200 km from Waterton to just north of Jasper I can only hope that hikers will also describe it as “one of the best trail experiences on earth.” 🐾

*David Hockey is a passionate Albertan and Chair of the Great Divide Trail Association.*

*David returned in August to continue his hike on the Pacific Crest Trail. His 2015 adventure stretched from August 5th to September 16th. The 1,300 km he traveled over those six weeks took him from Echo Lake, Nevada to just outside Bend, Oregon. To learn more about David’s adventures in 2014 and 2015 visit his blog: [http://postholer.com/journal/viewJournal.php?sid=71bf9f3a80c-bcdde9f2fa86e8039e305&event\\_id=2537](http://postholer.com/journal/viewJournal.php?sid=71bf9f3a80c-bcdde9f2fa86e8039e305&event_id=2537)*

## Featured Artist Jacquelyn Blight



*“After The Fire”, Photo Encaustic and Photo Transfer on 1/4” birch plywood, 10” x 8”*

# Outward Bound:

## Give Your Teen A Rocky Mountain High

By Ian Urquhart



**H**umankind has done an excellent job over the last 150 years of confirming General William Tecumseh Sherman's assessment of the U.S. Civil War. "War," Sherman said, "is hell." It's also true that wars, despite their horrors, also have sparked new ideas and innovations that have improved subsequent generations' quality of life. World War II gave us radar, synthetic rubber, penicillin, rockets, and computers. It also gave the world Outward Bound, the experiential educational organization, discussed here.

### The Origins of Outward Bound

The Battle of the Atlantic, the sea campaign that lasted for the duration of the World War II, was the catalyst for the creation of Outward Bound. In 1941 the German U-Boat fleet inflicted tremendous losses on the Allied convoys tasked with delivering military equipment, food, and other supplies to a besieged United Kingdom. The Germans were sinking merchant ships at a rate of more than two vessels per day throughout 1941. At this critical juncture the Outward Bound partnership was struck between Lawrence Holt, senior partner of a British shipping company, and Kurt Hahn, a German-born educator who fled Nazi Germany and established the Gordonstoun boarding school in Scotland in 1934. Holt's practical concern was that his young seamen didn't have the physical and emotional strength needed to survive at sea if they fell victim to German torpedoes. Challenge, often typical of outdoor

or wilderness adventures, was crucial to Hahn's conviction that education should develop the characters of young people in ways enabling them to deal well with unfamiliar situations, to be resilient and adaptable when facing uncertainty.

### Outward Bound in Canada, in Alberta

Since its birth in Wales in 1941 as a wartime imperative Outward Bound has expanded globally. Thirty-three countries now host its schools. More than 250,000 participate annually in the programs it offers at more than 250 wilderness and urban centres. Outward Bound came to Canada in 1969 and established its first centre along the banks of the Similkameen River just outside of Keremeos B.C. Today Outward Bound Canada offers 20 wilderness courses for individual youth and adult participants. These courses are delivered in magnificent settings on the West Coast, on the Bay of Fundy, in Northern Ontario, and in Alberta's Rockies. The organization also offers a very commendable range of charitable programs for women who have survived violence, veterans, youth-at-risk, and aboriginal youth.

I was particularly interested in learning more about the courses Outward Bound Canada (OBC) offers for youth in Alberta Rockies and was grateful for the chance to talk to Brendan Madden, OBC's National Director of Operations. Madden has been involved in expeditionary wilderness leadership programming for 20 years. His career began with OBC as an instructor in Northern Ontario right after he finished

university. His devotion to the value of this programming and commitment to experiential learning has taken him to a number of organizations over his career. Several years ago he returned to OBC to be the Director of the Rocky Mountain program before assuming his new current position in the organization.

For Madden the "experiential components of the adventurous journey in nature" help young people develop their inner strength, their inner resilience, and their leadership qualities. By leadership, a term perhaps used so often and cavalierly that it's lost its meaning, Madden means "the ability to influence a group of people to tackle a challenge that has serious real world outcomes if you don't get it right." These skills and abilities are as important now as they were to the first Outward Bound students more than 70 years ago. The challenges and uncertainties faced by that earlier generation have their equivalents today in issues such as climate change, mass migrations from war-torn and impoverished lands, and challenges to the established global economic order. The adventurous journeys available through the three Rocky Mountain OBC courses, and OBC wilderness courses more generally, offer today's youth experiences and "the tools to be resilient and strong and effective leaders meeting the challenges of an uncertain world."

### The Outward Bound Experience: What it Cultivates.

In 2016 OBC will offer three courses for teenagers in Alberta's Rockies. A 17-day





*Devil's Head (centre-right) and Mount Aylmer (centre-left) as seen from the top of Black Rock Mountain. PHOTO: © C. WEARMOUTH*

Rocky Mountain Adventure hiking course is designed for 14 and 15 year olds. Sixteen to 18 year olds are the participants targeted by the 21-day Rocky Mountain Discovery Classic Hiking trip and by the 18-day Rocky Mountain Hike and Canoe trip. Usually the maximum number of participants in any of these adventures is twelve; they will be led by three members of OBC's staff (two of these instructors will be fully certified while the third instructor may be a trainee). The hiking trips take place in the Ghost River Wilderness Area and in Ya Ha Tinda, east of Banff National Park. The hiking/canoe trip uses the Ghost and the North Saskatchewan as its platforms.

OBC courses are ones where student adventurers take more and more ownership and responsibility for their actions as their journey progresses. At the beginning instructors are very hands-on, very directive – cooking, whether in the backcountry or in the kitchen at home, may not be some-

thing at which the average 14-year old excels. By trip's end all the students should be sharing leadership roles within the group. Although OBC's teenagers learn a variety of technical skills over the course of their trip these courses are less about giving students highly technical skills and more about what Brendan called "collaborative problem solving." While teenagers should be better campers after an OBC course the instructors really strive to help young people develop the ability to work with others to solve challenges that, if handled poorly, can have unsavoury consequences. That ability to work together effectively and well is OBC's key to producing strong leaders – be they interested in business, in the non-profit sector, or in the emergency room of your local hospital.

The wilderness landscapes of the Ghost Wilderness and Ya Ha Tinda provide magnificent settings for the development of these skills. The hiking terrains they offer allow teenagers to face the risks of travel-

ing in the backcountry and discover how these risks may be approached responsibly. Hiking in these locales is frequently off-trail – this lets the youth groups address the great challenge posed by navigation. Fording mountain streams and rivers is a challenge that demands the members of the group work together. What routes through mountain passes work well? What routes pose unacceptable risks and dangers? What actions should all members of the adventure take in order to minimize the risks that come from camping and traveling through bear country?

### **Outward Bound: Course Credits, Inclusivity**

Currently, the majority of the teenagers in OBC programs come from the Greater Toronto Area. In part this is due to the fact that all of the Rocky Mountain courses may be used to fulfill Ontario high school credits. It's a shame that this option isn't available for Alberta high school students.



Vistas such as this await Outward Bound participants in its Rocky Mountain hikes program. PHOTO: © M. SCHUERZ.

Hopefully, Alberta Education will see the merit of an OBC education and incorporate all of its Canadian programs into its curriculum. The values of this program also appear to fit very well with the new Peter Lougheed Leadership College at the University of Alberta. Hopefully, university administrators will see the merits in this type of experiential education.

OBC courses aren't inexpensive and the organization is dedicated to broaden the intake of students from all social and economic strata. Kurt Hahn firmly believed that scholarships should be offered so students in Outward Bound courses would be drawn from more than just society's elite. In Canada the Royal Bank funds an aboriginal leadership program, the YMCA

sponsors street kids from Montréal, and Brett Wilson – the former member of *Dragon's Den* – regularly sponsors teens from his home province of Saskatchewan. Hopefully, Canadians and Canadian organizations will continue to donate to OBC's scholarship programs in order to promote the inclusivity that Hahn saw as a bedrock of the Outward Bound experience.

## Conclusion

Outward Bound takes its name, appropriately enough, from a nautical term that appealed to Lawrence Holt. Ships that were outward bound had left the safety of port for the uncertainties and rigours of the open sea. Holt also apparently said that the first Outward Bound program,

despite its focus on young seamen, was “less training for the sea than through the sea.” These thoughts remain at the core of today's Outward Bound experience and are put into practice in programs such as those offered by OBC in Alberta's Rockies. Teens who embark on OBC's adventurous journeys in nature are likely to learn much about themselves, others, and the qualities needed to thrive in our fast-changing world. 🌄

For more information about  
Outward Bound Canada visit their  
website: [www.outwardbound.ca](http://www.outwardbound.ca)



# Connecting Persons with a Disability to Nature:

## Introducing Coyote Lake Lodge lecture

By Ross W. Wein, *President, Alberta Abilities Lodges Society*



**P**icture yourself restricted to your bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom with no chance of getting outdoors for years. This sounds like prison, doesn't it? This is what life could be like for people with a disability. For persons with a disability, isolation like this can be especially severe as the days shorten through autumn. The following is based heavily on a personal story. The type of event that occurred to my son Danny led our family to work toward improving the quality of life of persons with physical and cognitive disabilities. Such stories have led many others to join us on this path. We are making opportunities for these special people to receive the recreational, educational, and social benefits found in the nature of wild lands.

Friends with a disability say there have been great changes over the past few decades in societal recognition of the rights of persons with a disability. Individual human rights is a high profile issue now; Canada finally ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2010. This is a promise to protect, promote, and advance the rights of this group of citizens. Inclusivity is an increasingly-accepted idea; schools have accepted the challenge and youth are more sensitive to the benefits of social diversity. In practical terms, urban sidewalks have sloped sections. Urban businesses and government buildings have ramps, doors that open to the touch of a button, elevators, and low counters. Above all, more employers recognize persons with a disability as valued members of society.

In rural areas, parks, and wilderness, there is a way to go. During your last outdoor trip,

how many hikers on the trail were persons with a disability? The proportion was probably small even though about 15 percent of the general population is made up of persons with a disability. Furthermore, seniors constitute another 15 percent of the Alberta population.

There are some bright spots for inclusion that are more than a photo-op at an event. Here is one example: William Watson Lodge is an Alberta government-owned accessible facility in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park in Kananaskis. It has been serving persons with a disability and seniors every year for 35 years. Families can stay for days or a week in a cabin that is wheelchair friendly. Families can enjoy the cabins, the trails, and the majestic mountains. Many people have asked why there was no comparable facility in central or northern Alberta. My friends and

my family decided to do something about this deficiency in service by establishing the Alberta Abilities Lodges Society and later another lodge that we have named Coyote Lake Lodge. This lodge is modelled, in part, on William Watson Lodge and on other lodges we have visited in Europe.

### Where did the inspiration for such a lodge come from?

There is a very simple answer to this question based on the story documented in a 2012 book entitled *Don't worry Mom, I will be home for Christmas*. In 1998 my son, Danny, had graduated from the University of Alberta in Aquatic Ecology where he did his undergraduate thesis in David Schindler's lab. He had been awarded a NSERC Scholarship for MSc studies and planned to enroll at the University of British Columbia. But, first



The central building at Coyote Lake Lodge PHOTO: © R. WEIN

he wanted to take a trip of a lifetime from Edmonton to South America by motorcycle. He made it only to Bogotá, Colombia, where he was almost killed in a crash with a truck. He is now restricted to a power wheel chair after many months of recovery in medical facilities.

## Why should AWA members care about our society and its ambitions?

First, the cause is important to a large and special group in our society. With 400,000 persons with a disability in Alberta and the fact that William Watson Lodge is so over-subscribed that they turn away 6,000 people per year, there is certainly a need and demand for more of these facilities. Since our Alberta Abilities Lodges Society was registered in 2006 and received charitable status in 2007, we have been working toward an inclusive senior-friendly and disability-friendly wilderness lodge. The over-riding goal of such a lodge was to make opportunities for everyone to interact with nature throughout the year; few conservation and wellness lodges have such a goal. Second, these special people are valuable members in society and many of us have overlooked their latent talents that can be applied to gain a better understanding of nature. For example, while a person may be blind, other senses compensate. This may be a revelation to us because they hear sounds that we ignore. They smell odours that we do not appreciate. They feel wind and plant textures that we miss. In a nut shell, they can educate those of us who are able-bodied.

## What has been achieved to this point in time?

From 2009 to 2014 the society developed networks, accumulated specialized outdoor equipment including TrailRiders, tandem bicycles, hockey sledges, canoes and kayaks, held outdoor events, and established a travel endowment. Our giant leap forward came when we received the keys to a lodge property on December 9, 2014. The property is located 60 kilometres directly west of the City of Leduc in Central Alberta. Its 3/4 of a square



*Tandem bicycles allow a blind student to experience the freedom that comes from riding. PHOTO: © R. WEIN*

mile (480 acres or 195 hectares) of hills and valleys is half forested and a wildlife haven. It is surrounded by government protected areas and also Nature Conservancy of Canada properties. The lodge property has a stream and forest corridor from Coyote Lake to the North Saskatchewan River so coyote, fox, elk, moose, and deer tracks are everywhere. Neighbours have seen bears, wolves, and cougars on rare occasions as well. The property hosts many bird species because it's located on a tongue of the Boreal Forest Natural Region that reaches southward between the Foothills Natural Region and the Parkland Natural Region. Part of the land will support programs in garden, sport, and hiking trail therapies. There is a main lodge with a commercial kitchen, a dining room, a library, four bedrooms, and a meeting room. Walkways from the main lodge lead to four, two-family cabins and a recreation centre. A service centre completes the complex of buildings.

Since accepting the property keys, we have welcomed volunteers to renovate buildings to current building codes as well as to international accessibility standards. During 2015, volunteers built trails and sports fields and started to cultivate part of the several hectares of gardens.

We will offer overnight house-keeping accommodation where families experience na-

ture and the healing power of wilderness as they enjoy respite and exercise as they travel our trails. They will gain confidence, achieve better health, strengthen family relationships, and... have lots of fun. Also, the lodge will be used as a base to explore Alberta's regional environmental and cultural legacies.

## What have the rewards been?

While we are just preparing our accommodation and starting our programs, families that have stayed at William Watson Lodge are enthusiastic about the many benefits a facility like ours may deliver. AALS conducted a Needs Assessment before we began to search for a property to get responses from those who have visited William Watson Lodge. Here are a few of the dozens of verbatim comments recorded in our digital survey:

*"Our son, -----, 22, has Down syndrome and functions at a two-year-old level. Since moving to Alberta 17 years ago from -----, we were overjoyed to discover William Watson Lodge. We visit the lodge twice a year and find it such a rejuvenating experience as a family. At William Watson Lodge we are able to be just like any other family – participating*



in activities together and with other families and just simply spending quality time together at a beautiful resort that we would not be able to afford otherwise. For 17 years we have told each other hundreds of times how grateful we have been to have been welcomed to this paradise.”

“William Watson Lodge supports people in having a high quality life through engagement in the outdoors. The Lodge promotes health and wellbeing through high levels of engagement, independence and focusing on abilities rather than disabilities.”

“William Watson Lodge was a huge part of our family weekends and vacations. We couldn't really believe that a facility like this was available to us. When we first heard of the lodge our physically challenged daughter was quite young and we had two older active boys. Trying to find a way to enjoy vacations together could be a bit of a challenge. William Watson allowed us to have an accessible place to stay as well as having hiking, biking, skiing paths available for all of us. Also the availability of adaptive equipment

greatly assisted us in being able to do activities together.”

“Deaf people as a general rule is a collective cultural group and they need a site base for their activities that enable Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to experience an enhanced quality of life.”

“I am currently employed full time with people with disabilities and am in my late 50s. I need a place to dream to, and to help me rest in the knowledge that life will not only be work. I need to know that I can bring the people I work with to a safe place that they can afford that will stimulate and encourage their intellectual and physical wellness.”

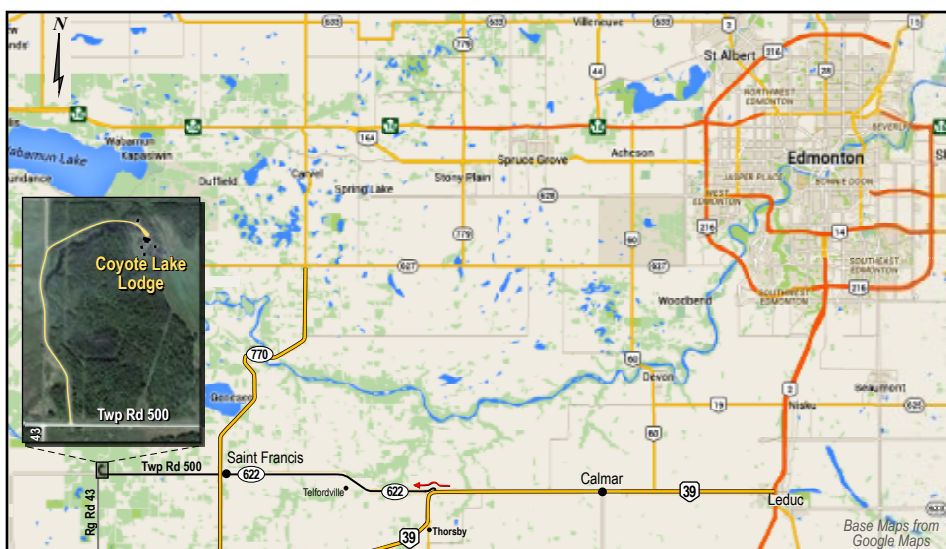
These and other comments speak to the value of a lodge that caters to those with a wide range of types and levels of disabilities. Hundreds of donors have responded financially to our lodge vision because they have a person with a disability in their family or they know someone who needs such a facility. Our facility will provide the healing power of nature to my son, Danny, and thousands like him in Alberta who are living with physical and cognitive challenges. Coyote Lake Lodge will welcome all families who face challenges like ours.

## What are the plans and priorities for the future?

Development of facilities and programming will depend on funding, but we are confident that our dedicated supporters will make the vision a reality. While programming is a priority, conservation actions will be the backbone of the lodge activities. There are many time scales of activities. On the scale of days and weeks, and months, we will cater to our special guests for both day and night programming. On the scale of months, the seasonal changes will be emphasized: equipment for transport and programming will change from water and soil to snow and ice. On the scale of years, maintenance and expansion will depend on demonstrated need. On the scale of decades the lodge must adapt to the needs and aspirations of society as well as our special guests; for example, we know the numbers of seniors and other persons with disabilities are increasing.

We hope you will agree that Coyote Lake Lodge is worthy of investment. Ask to be included in our email list, visit our lodge, tell your friends about our project, volunteer your time and talents, and donate to our charitable society if you can. Every dollar supports the renovations of this new opportunity to serve – in a similar way to the 35 years provided by William Watson Lodge in Kananaskis.

Finally, I wish to present a challenge to you with an activity that has given me much enjoyment. On your next nature outing, include someone with a disability and that person's caregiver. Learn that some of their senses are more acute than yours. Look past the disability to understand the person. I can predict that your life will be enriched – as will theirs. 🌲



Coyote Lake Lodge is a short drive west of Edmonton/Leduc. The lodge is located just off of Township Road 500.

You can contact the Society at:  
 Alberta Abilities Lodges Society,  
 PO Box 4455, Edmonton, Alberta  
 T6E 4T5;  
[www.aals.ca](http://www.aals.ca);  
 780-436-0141;  
[rosswein@shaw.ca](mailto:rosswein@shaw.ca)

# A Wild Dilemma:

## Alberta's Feral Horse Strategy

By Vivian Pharis, AWA Board Member



I love horses and have been around them all my life. I find it as thrilling as anyone would to come on a herd of wild ones and to watch their natural behaviour. That they were becoming a threat to Alberta habitats was news to me, when two years ago AWA was asked to participate in a government advisory committee to develop a wild horse management strategy. In the half century that I have roamed Alberta's Eastern Slopes, wild horses were always part of the landscape. Their numbers seemed constant. The population was held in check by predators, cold winters, and periodic round ups. Old log corrals, often hidden deep in the forest and often with long lead wings, were a rustic part of the landscape in many areas of the Front Range and foothills. Round ups were a part of Alberta's colourful recent past. It was not until renegades were caught cruelly roping and snaring wild horses for the meat trade that Alberta brought in its 1994 Horse Capture Regulation under the *Stray Animals Act* in order to ensure humane treatment during capture.

The request to join a government advisory body put AWA in a dilemma because wild horses are actually feral or an introduced species. As such we had to ask ourselves if should we participate in a plan for them. AWA had participated as an advisor in the removal of feral horses prior to the 2003 designation of the Suffield National Wildlife Area in southeast Alberta. That participation led AWA to develop a formal position on feral horses, recognizing them as an introduced species in conflict with native wildlife. Participating in the govern-

ment advisory body was left to me since I was the only "horse person" on the AWA Board.

I looked carefully at the mix of those invited to form a new advisory body, at the ESRD personalities that would usher the process along, and at the mandate to complete a strategy in one year. All aspects looked interesting even to my jaded eyes – I have sat on similar bodies for years and watched them, in the end, achieve little or nothing. I still bear the scars of five long years trying to develop a Forest Conservation Strategy in the 1990s. Then, once government became involved, the strategy metamorphosed into something insipid and meaningless. AWA, as co-chair, refused to sign the process's final report. Since that report I believe our forests have continued to be cut ruinously to this day without regard to the importance of their non-timber values. I did not want to be part of another such process. Could this committee achieve its goal in one year, and if so, could it then become a model for wildlife management planning?

A broad range of relevant participants were invited to participate on the proposed Alberta Feral Horse Advisory Committee. Invitees came from the forest industry, veterinarian, police, municipal, farmer, humane, horse preservation, conservation, horse trapper, outfitter, and range management sectors. The ESRD officials seemed focused and told us the mandate to draft a strategy came directly from the minister. It was obvious that if the minister wanted action on the publicly contentious issue of feral horses it had to be taken through

a publicly credible process. I decided this committee was designed to achieve rather than placate and agreed to represent AWA.

So, what is all the fuss over Alberta's Eastern Slopes feral horses? Their place on the landscape had elicited media attention from as far away as Ontario, nasty harassment of many committee members, and, in my case, confrontation half a world away in New Zealand. Why? I have no logical answer why much public emotion and fury is generated over horses, whereas hardly a whisper is heard for our vanishing caribou or the poor wolf, painfully managed through choking snares, agonizing poisons, and aerial shootings. Alberta has about 900 feral horses, which doesn't sound like many, considering the size of the landscape. But, horses are herd animals, at home on the landscape year around. They tend to concentrate in their herds on open grasslands such as south-facing slopes and wetland meadows. There they cause damage and come into conflict with native wildlife needing the same areas at the same time. Conflict on the range also develops with with summer-grazing cattle, privileged under long-standing grazing commitments. Perhaps because of milder winters and fewer roundups, there has been a steady increase in feral horse numbers in the last decade. Habitat degradation also has increased. Despite these conflicts and this degrading the Alberta Government committed to maintain viable numbers of feral horses on the landscape.

There was consensus from the first meeting of the new advisory body that Alberta's wild horses needed to be managed. To kick



it off, it was recommended to conduct the first capture in several years. The committee is now into its second year, and we have in hand the draft of a final report based on the learning and solutions phases of the strategy; implementation is underway through capture and adoption and a long-range contraception plan has already been initiated. A lot has been achieved through the committed, cooperative effort of all. It was most helpful that any expert advice requested by the committee in its deliberations was provided. This government committee has been different from any other I have sat on in the last 35 years.

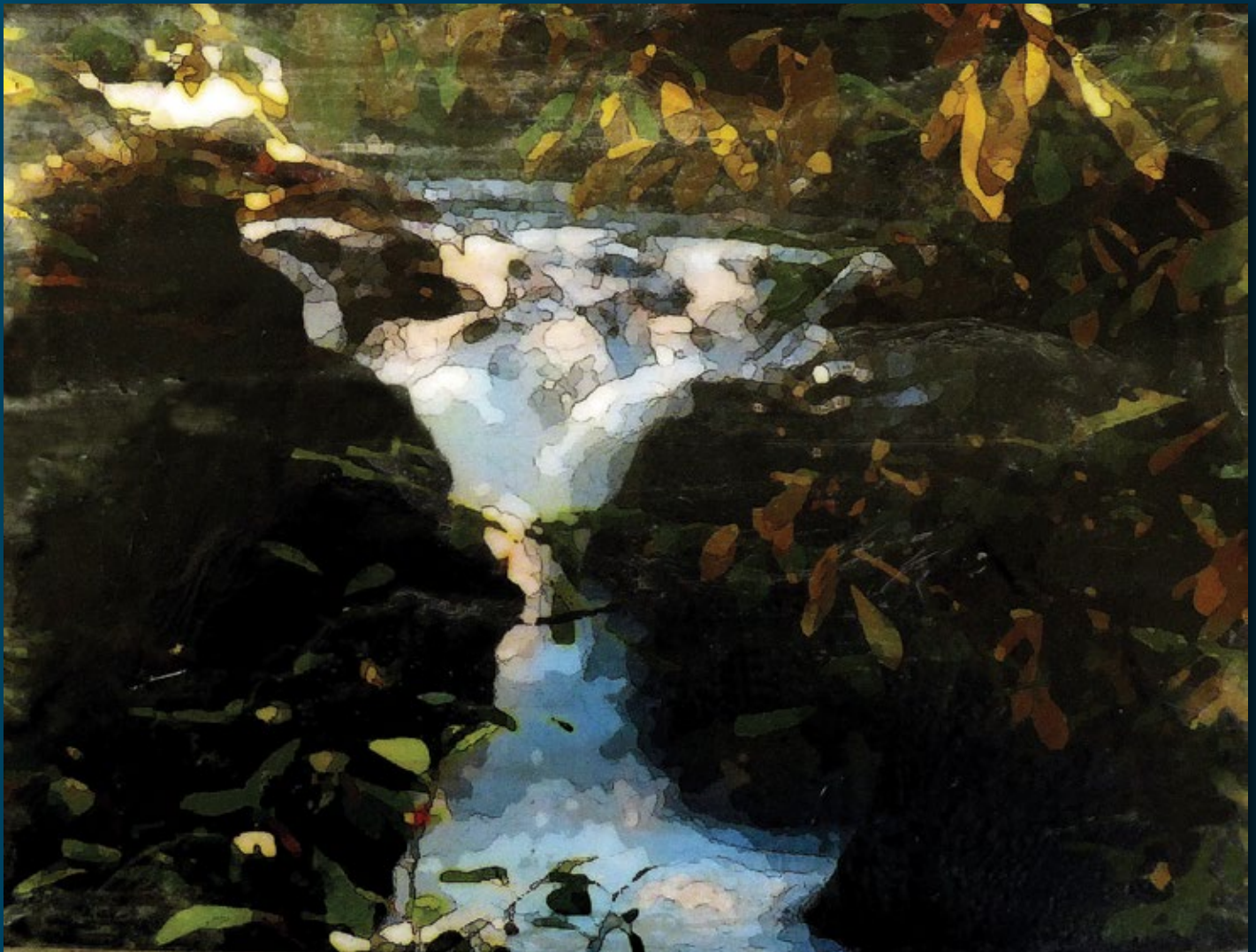
The first two years of management under the evolving strategy involved capturing some horses (12 in 2014 and 48 in 2015)

using bait corrals and licensed trappers. Most captured horses in 2014 were adopted, one stallion going all the way to a Manitoba breeding program. Of those captured in 2015, all but one was adopted, with more demand than available animals. The goal is to work using proven techniques developed over 29 years by Dr. Jay Kirkpatrick of the USA to control fertility in wild horses, donkeys and deer, in African game park animals, and in zoo animals. The goal is to eventually control the fertility of Alberta's feral horses. The contraceptive Zona Stat H (see [http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press\\_releases/2012/02/EPA\\_Announces\\_First\\_Fertility\\_Control\\_Vaccine\\_for\\_Wild\\_Horses.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press_releases/2012/02/EPA_Announces_First_Fertility_Control_Vaccine_for_Wild_Horses.html)) is administered by darting mares without foals. This darting

will be needed until herds are stabilized at sustainable numbers, and thereafter to maintain their numbers. A next task for the advisory committee is to try to establish sustainable numbers for the various herds. These populations will be based on habitat carrying capacity and must be large enough to ensure genetic viability is maintained.

Much credit for the success in implementing the feral horse strategy over the past two years must go to the Wild Horses of Alberta Society (WHOAS). This group and its dedicated volunteers have long rescued troubled horses, saving perhaps five to ten animals a year. These horses are worked with until they can be adopted by homes meeting WHOAS adopting criteria. This

## Featured Artist Jacquelyn Blight



*"Secret Falls", Photo Encaustic on birch plywood, 10" x 8"*

year the group has had to considerably scale up their resources and activities since they agreed to accept captured feral horses. A recent land donation gives WHOAS a working base where they now shelter, feed, and train horses prior to adoption. This year they put 31 horses through their facilities, 28 chosen from those captured, and three rescued animals. Males were gelded and all were given an intensive 6-week quieting and training program prior to coming up for adoption. All of this important work comes at WHOAS's expense.

WHOAS also has an observer participate during official aerial counts of feral horses and group members are involved in feral horse identification, charting individual markings, and assembling photographs. All this detailed work is necessary for the next phase of their operations, which is to undertake a scientifically administered contraceptive program. Such a program is not for the faint of heart and must be undertaken diligently, accurately, and under trying, sometimes dangerous, conditions. They have also agreed to fund this program, no easy task for any volunteer group. Albertans owe WHOAS a huge debt of gratitude.

Considering WHOAS's dedicated work to rescue and humanely manage Alberta's mistreated and feral horses, one would expect it to be saved from the sort of extremist bullying other committee members

have received. Not so – even WHOAS is targeted with abuse from a certain sector that wants horses to be left untouched on the range and to breed freely. The major problem with such a hands-off approach is what it will inevitably mean for the landscape and native species.

In the U.S. public sentiment forced the passing in 1971 of a federal law recognizing wild horses and donkeys as historical resources that could not be harassed or killed. By 1983, the populations of mustangs and donkeys on public lands had grown to 65,000 animals and they were seriously damaging habitat. A capture program, where roughly 10,000 animals a year were taken, was initiated. Currently, the bitter fruit of these efforts is seen in the nearly 50,000 feral horses and donkeys that eek out miserable lives in dirt pens and cost American taxpayers over \$75 million a year for their care. The size of the population easily and early exceeded the numbers an adoption option could have addressed. Contraception programs are, in some parts of the U.S., showing promise in controlling numbers and cutting capture and maintenance costs.

Australia offers an even more extreme example of runaway horse fecundity. There are an estimated 400,000 brumbies or feral horses range across public lands and cause much damage to the Australian landscapes, even in national parks. With the

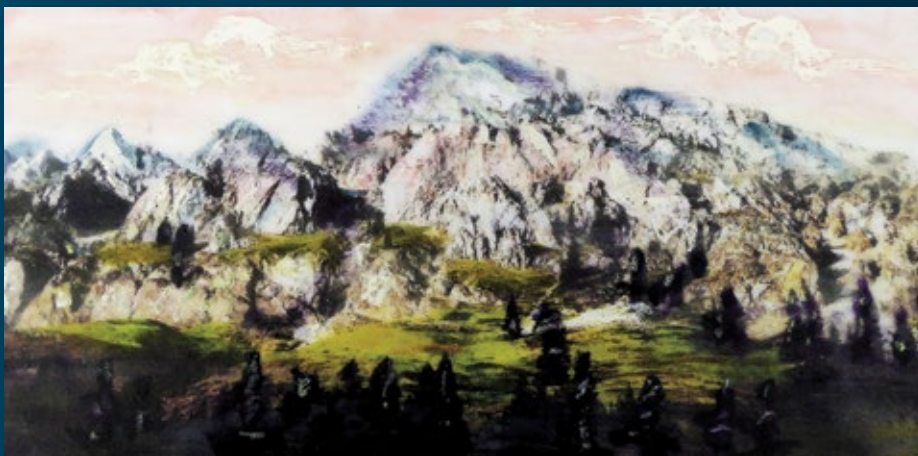
bleeding of conservation groups, they now are being aerially shot by the thousands, although desperate attempts are being made to adopt some more rational forms of management.

In my experience, most extreme horse preservationist arguments rely on a common position – that the horse is native to Alberta since it has been here since pre-historic times. Therefore the wild horse is part of today's ecology and should be allowed to roam at will. The problem with this position is that nearly 10,000 years have passed since the pony-sized *Equus conversidens* last roamed the late Pleistocene landscape of what is now Alberta. A 2001 archaeological dig in the St. Mary's River of southern Alberta revealed horse bones apparently scarred by Clovis spear heads that dated from more than 13,000 years ago. Spear heads and scraping tools found nearby still hold protein fragments identified as horse blood, showing *Equus conversidens* was on ancient human menus. This archaeological work also raises the possibility that man hunted to extinction in Alberta, not only this horse, but also a camel, a massive bison, and the woolly mammoth. They are all represented at the St. Mary's site.

The pony-sized pre-historic horse is certainly not the same species as the modern horse, *Equus ferus caballus*. The modern horse, the ancestor of those found now along the Eastern Slopes, first came to North America with the Spanish conquistadors in the 16th Century and has only been freely roaming Alberta for about the last 100 years.

Of course, a major reason a feral horse strategy could be achieved in such short order is that this animal falls under no legislation except the *Stray Animals Act* and *Horse Capture Regulation*. The feral horse is neither wildlife nor livestock. It is WHOAS's hope that the feral horse eventually becomes recognized under legislation as a (managed) heritage animal. But, right now it is an animal in an identification dilemma, although its place in Alberta's landscape is officially assured. 🐾

## Featured Artist Jacquelyn Blight



"Cruising Route 40", Photo Encaustic on canvas, 20"x10"



# A Sea of Grass:

## The 2015 Northern Prairie Conservation Network Meeting

By Christyann Olson, AWA Executive Director

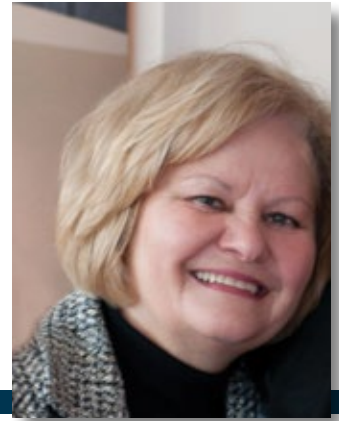


PHOTO: © C. PAINTER

It was the end of a perfect field day as we piled back into our vehicles after the photo taken here leaving Thunder Basin National Grassland. The clouds were building and for 360 degrees you could see Wyoming's famous big sky looming over Thunder Basin's magnificent grasslands and vistas. I saw my first swift fox in the wild; she had two little ones that promptly popped down in the den once she spotted us. Dennis Jorgensen (WWF-US) jumped out of the truck before it stopped to pick up a bull snake slithering across the road. Cristi Painter, one of our guides, almost forgot to stop the truck she was driving when she saw the chance to show us killdeer babies on the roadside. A bleat not unlike that of a mother goat startled us; the baby pronghorn that called out jumped behind our truck and across the road where mom scolded her baby as they

bounded across the horizon. The wild and natural prairie teemed with wildlife and the smells of sagebrush and grass. Add a chorus of frogs calling and we had a peaceful and powerful reminder that this vital ecosystem is so highly underappreciated by so many.

I was there for the Northern Plains Conservation Network's biannual meeting in Douglas, Wyoming. This was the first time I had the good fortune to have the opportunity to meet colleagues we have 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, publicly launched the vision for a "sea of grass" and joined the team that is the NPCN. AWA's Cliff Wallis has represented AWA in this network from its inception. Jonathan Proctor (*Defenders of Wildlife*) came

to Calgary for the press conference and tells me now he was amazed at the media coverage and interest the launch received. Calgary was the perfect location for the launch since at the time the Network decided conditions weren't favourable enough yet to launch this vision in the United States.

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

Eleven years later, the network is stronger. Many of the founders are still here and acre



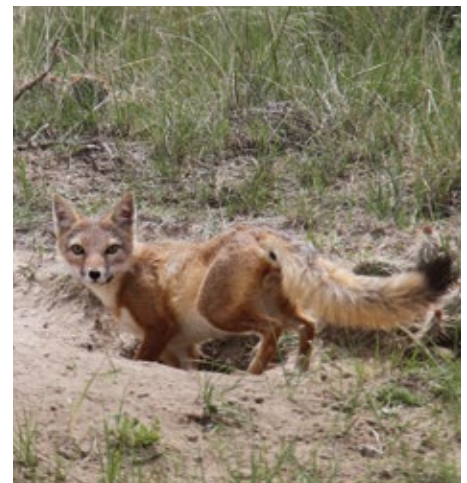


PHOTO: © WWF

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

This year's meetings provided opportunities to meet and greet, tell stories, and share successes, triumphs and difficulties. Bison are being reintroduced, prairie dog colonies are growing, and greater sage-grouse prospects are brightening due to actions such as no burning and selective burning in grouse hab-

itat. It was a chance to regenerate enthusiasm, to know the value of the hard conservation work we do. We learned from Steve Forrest (*Defenders of Wildlife*) that their recent survey in Montana showed 80 percent of voters support wild bison population restoration. Curt Freese, one of the founders of NPCN, is working on a book to document the history of the Network and the ideas that led to the American Prairie Reserve. Randy Matchett, a biologist with the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, is working on prairie dogs and plague and how to mitigate plague in their populations. This Refuge spreads over 1.1 million acres – more than 4,400 square kilometres. The Refuge has developed a



Swift Fox in the Thunder Basin National Grassland. PHOTO: © C. OLSON

four-year plan, using an oral vaccine for prairie dogs. Sage-grouse research is also an important part of the Refuge's mandate.

Laurel Vicklund of the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association related encouraging and important successes this group of landowners, ENGOs and government employees has achieved. They have created and are now implementing a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for great sage-grouse (see Ian Urquhart's article in the October 2014 WLA for more information on this and other approaches to protecting sage-grouse in the U.S.). The area involved is 13.2 million acres, with 77 percent of the land owned privately. The agreement provides property owners appropriate assurance that no additional regulatory requirements will be imposed should the covered species be listed under the U.S. *Endangered Species Act*. The conservation strategy benefits mean that they are promoting sustainable populations and habitats of the covered species and other obligates of sage and short grass prairie. Nearly three million dollars has been invested to enhance sage and short grass habitats. Thirty-five thousand acres have been treated for cheat-grass; 2,900 acres of enhanced nesting cover has been created in sage-grouse core areas.

The Association has been conducting research and monitoring this area for fifteen years now. Their activities include: 835 vegetation transects, small mammal and breeding bird surveys, raptor nest searches, sage-grouse telemetry and lek cameras, sagebrush



cover mapping. This impressive amount of work has generated 110 best practices for sustaining the eight species they are targeting. Adaptive management is used, meaning they can alter course after starting an approach if they realize it isn't going to work. Laurel emphasized the Association is a partnership where participants all learn together. Terms like "them" and "us" are left at the door.

David Augustine of the Agricultural Research Service spoke about how to manage disturbances in grasslands to promote conservation. David's research in Thunder Basin is focused on grazing, prairie dog and grassland bird interactions. Prairie dogs and fire are better than cattle when it comes to keeping the ground bare. Prairie dog colonies are vital for mountain plovers - plovers need the bare ground for nesting. Mountain plovers love prescribed burn areas and heavily grazed areas. When we were out in the field we saw an excellent example of this when a few mountain plovers on an active prairie dog colony chirped away at us for interrupting their day. David emphasized how livestock, prairie dogs, and prescribed fire all interact. The challenging question is: how

do we manage a large landscape for multiple ecosystem benefits in the face of external drivers? The role of wildfire in managing is a positive element in the toolkit these managers use. When managing for short grass versus sagebrush ecosystems David reminded us that ecological integrity is important and it is not possible to manage for both of these priorities in the same place at the same time. The importance of communication and the discussions that need to happen in order to try to balance these objectives are part of David's daily work.

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 bison on the tri-lateral conservation table made up of Canada, Mexico, and U.S. There are many ways countries can cooperate. Grasslands National Park could sustain 1,000 bison, and fencing of the entire west unit would mean they could sustain more than 1,000. The Grassland Bird Initiative is focused on best management practices. The sage-grouse will remain in the forefront of management as the U.S just decided not to list the bird under the

ESA. Onefour Research Station lands in Canada were brought up to underline that there has been no consultation with the conservation community about this imminent change in government ownership of these lands. The transition may mean there is simply no more research and the area could become part of an existing grazing cooperative for cattle. This would be tragic, unacceptable.

We were on our way back to Douglas. Dark thunder clouds ate up the sky, lightning streaked across that big Wyoming sky, and then a rainbow appeared. Nature captured well what a great day it had been. In the truck we talked about our wonderful field tour. I heard how surprised folks were about this group's incredible passion for the high plains and these grasslands. One of the Forest Service staff related that they had been warned about ENGOS early in his career but how, through the years and opportunities to work with ENGOS, he really valued opportunities to work with us. Conservation is our shared vision. As one of our other colleagues, Dr. David Naugle, inferred not too long ago, *let's work on the 80% we agree on, not the 20% we are uncertain of.* 🌩️



The Thunder Basin National Grassland in northeastern Wyoming has a semi-arid climate and is found between elevations of 3,600 and 5,200 feet. PHOTO: © C. WALLIS

# Conservation Corner

## Bones, Bats, and Birds: Under the Spell of the Badlands

By Niki Wilson



**A**t 3:00am the piercing wail and subsequent babble of coyotes broke the dead calm of a moonlit night. I've heard coyotes yelp and yip many times, but seldom from as close as these serenaders. One's vocabulary was so intricate I could have sworn it was trying to speak.

Camped on a sandy island in the middle of the Red Deer River in Alberta's Badlands, we lay awake and listened to the coyotes call back and forth just beyond the walls of our tent. If I were home, I would have been lamenting the lack of sleep, but as our son slept beside us, my husband and I exchanged big grins and raised eyebrows as the coyotes circled. It was more invigorating than tiring. In the quiet between the coyote chatter, beavers slid down well-worn, muddy slides and splashed into the water.

When we planned this trip down the Red Deer River from Dinosaur Provincial Park to the hamlet of Jenner, our imaginations were preoccupied with the hunt for di-

nosaur bones. Camped at the Provincial Park for a few days before our river trip, interpreters brought us up to speed on the hadrosaurs and centrosaurs that walked these lands in the Jurassic and Cretaceous geologic periods. We were three families ready to make the find of a century.

The otherworldly features of the badlands quickly called the kids to them. On our first night in the campground, they scrambled up onto a mesa and, silhouetted by a full moon, had sword fights with sticks, performed cartwheels in the washes, and slid repeatedly down silty slopes until you could barely tell one from the next. Bats swooped and dove among them, hunting for the insects these new, feral animals kicked up into the air. We parents could not bring ourselves to break the spell and the kids finally collapsed in the tents well after midnight.

The full force of the southern Alberta sun fell upon us early the next day and anyone not out of bed by 9:00am endured a sweaty sauna in their sleeping bags. Our

first attempts to familiarize ourselves with the fossil-rich rock formations lasted a short couple of hours as the mercury crept up to 36 degrees. The promise of shade at the campground called us back.

While parents prepared for launch the next day, kids rolled around in the stream that bisects the campground. At one point a small snake visited them, probably one of the local garters, although our budding young herpetologists all swore it was a rattler. In stories years from now, it's easy to imagine the snake will be three feet long with a rattle the size of a banana. One thing's for sure – they'll remember it.

The next day we pushed our canoes into the river early afternoon. Before this trip, I considered the badlands a stark, arid, landscape – beautiful in its own way, but not the stage for a diversity of species it proved itself to be.

On every island herons took flight to perches further down the river, leaving their tracks for the kids to outline with sticks. Moose crossed the river several times in our proximity, and, in one weird encounter, a confused Canada goose swam by with all but its black head underwater. It was so bizarre that for several moments we thought it might be an otter.

We were lucky to travel with a talented birder, who pointed out the Says phoebe and other fantastical birds I'd never heard of. The big ones I got on my own: eagles circled, osprey plunged, and the herons continued to lure us downstream. Cliff swallows built nests of clay in the cliffs that looked like they belonged on a dry planet in the Star Wars movies, and less in



*What Tales are Told Around Campfires in the Badlands?* PHOTO: © G. SKINNER





*Niki and her son Dylan in Alberta's Badlands*  
PHOTO: © G. SKINNER

the province we call home.

The silty bottom and shores of the Red Deer are littered with the bones of bison that once roamed the Alberta plains in great herds. Their remains are joined by more recent contributions from their modern day cousins – cows. We weren't long on the river before kids were pointing them out, hoping for these bones to be much older – perhaps part of the skeleton of a gigantic prehistoric meat-eater, or maybe a towering vegetarian.

Thus, when it came time for the serious business of bone-hunting, the kids were ready to find a dinosaur. We parked the boats, donned our rattler-proofing gaiters,

and made our way up to the soil layers said to be laden with remains of these great beasts. We were not disappointed.

The kids scoured the low angle slopes, finding bone shards and skin impressions everywhere. We found the tail vertebrae of a large dinosaur, and the tooth of an *Albertosaurus*. Dinosaur fever gripped us – we wanted to find more, more, more! Perhaps this is why we lost track of time, realized dinnertime had come and gone, and faced a daunting paddle yet to make our planned campsite.

The wind was not in league with the Red Deer River. Strong winds pushed upstream in the late afternoon, making wet noodles of our arms as we paddled harder than our muscles wanted to do. We arrived at dusk, tired and hungry. Thankfully, our dinosaur fever had only cost us a couple of cranky kids and some sunlight.

A short while later, we found ourselves with full bellies, huddled around a small, driftwood fire cradling cups of hot chocolate and good port. We watched the moon rise again, lighting our camp so that no headlamps were necessary. Kids settled in beside parents, tired and content, imaginations filled with wild things both long

past and present. That night the coyotes announced their presence, reminding us that despite the settlement that surrounds it, the badlands is still gloriously untamed.

I can honestly say that this trip was a life highlight for me. Our flotilla looked as motley as its crew – canoes, plastic kids kayaks and one blow up dingy – I loved it. I felt the kids absorbed the memory of every new curl in the river, of every new species we encountered. The sun, the moon, the bones, the birds. The connection to the place. The magic. I hope it wove itself into their very being. These wonders make us rich. 🐾

*Niki Wilson is a multi-media science communicator and biologist living in Jasper. Visit her at [www.nikiwilson.com](http://www.nikiwilson.com)*



*Kids...just being kids* PHOTO: © N. WILSON



*Our flotilla...what magic awaits around the bend?* PHOTO: © G. SKINNER

# Turning 50 Never Felt So Good

June 25, 2015...the day marked Alberta Wilderness Association's 50th birthday and we celebrated this milestone with an open house at our heritage building headquarters – Hillhurst Cottage School. Veteran and new members of our conservation community joined special guests Mayor Naheed Nenshi and Councillor Druh Farrell in toasting AWA's successes and imagining a brighter future for wild Alberta. That future will be imagined and implemented from our longstanding home in Kensington, a

home we have purchased gratefully from the City of Calgary with the help of many donors.

Volunteers have long played a major role in making AWA a conservation leader in Alberta. This report is a testament to their importance. The photos from Kevin Mihalcheon and José Quiroz enrich the story; Aislinn MacCulloch generously transcribed the speeches that follow (next issue we'll be publishing the reminiscences of Chris Havard and Vivian Pharis about

their lives in AWA); Alex Spence produced a marvelous video of the celebration that you can view on our website at: <http://albertawilderness.ca/archive/news/2015-06-25-awa-50th-anniversary-and-hillhurst-cottage-school-celebration-video>.

Thanks to all who have made the first 50 years of Alberta Wilderness Association so memorable.

*Ian Urquhart*

## Transcript of Mayor Naheed Nenshi's speech:

Thanks very much Richard, and let me start by saying "Okii," that is, of course, hello in Blackfoot. And I think that it's important today as we're going to be talking about history, and as we're going to be talking about the future that we acknowledge we are standing today on ancient lands. For thousands of years people have been coming to the banks of this great river, to live and to love and to trade and to build community. And so let's start today by acknowledging that we are in this place called *motiskis*, the Elbow, the traditional lands of the Blackfoot people, shared of course by the other peoples of Treaty Seven: the Beaver people of the Siksika Nation and the Nakoda people of the Stoney Nations. It is on their history and on their legacy that we continue to build history today. And certainly we are standing in a place with a lot of history.

I am absolutely thrilled to be here to honour the Alberta Wilderness Association, on their fiftieth anniversary. The Alberta Wilderness Association are of course one of the most important advocates for a wild Alberta, that's what it says here a wild Alberta... Councillor Farrell we don't mean stampede tents, crowds next to your house, down the street, many many times. I'm excited to celebrate this fiftieth anniversary milestone



Mayor Naheed Nenshi and AWA Executive Director Christyann Olson PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

with you. You know, the Alberta Wilderness Association isn't just about wilderness, it's about citizenship, it's about stewardship, it's about looking after the community, and I think that that is an extraordinary thing. And what a great way to celebrate, the fiftieth birthday of this organization, by purchasing this home, this beautiful space, this Hillhurst Cottage School. I understand that the fundraising is almost done. Richard told me he's got twelve hundred bucks left to raise. So what I'm basically telling all of you in this room...is that balance is hitting zero before anybody leaves. Hit up the bear for money as you're wandering through.

I'm quite serious; open your wallets and let's finish it today as we celebrate our fiftieth birthday.

This building was built in 1910. It was built on land purchased from Ezra Riley... the namesake of Riley Park just to the north of us. And in 1910, Calgary was in its infancy. One hundred years before I became mayor... just saying. But the people of 1910 were living at the end or actually the middle of Calgary's first great boom. Between 1902 and 1912, Calgary increased its population tenfold. Imagine that. But the people of that time were not building for the community they had; they were



building for the community that was yet to be. In 1910 the ground was broken on a magnificent new city hall, much too big for the city at the time; magnificent—a magnificent sandstone building; a woman called Annie was going door to door, attempting to raise funds for a new public library. The public library, by the way, which we now know as Memorial Park Library, celebrated its hundredth anniversary four years ago now. It was funded by Andrew Carnegie — Annie, her letters went far and she was able to get his ear. Government buildings and recreation facilities, Calgary's first playground was built at that time. And we were entirely building for the future. And the Hillhurst Cottage School was part of that growth. It was part of the dream of those people for the future.

And I feel like we're in a similar space right now. I feel like we're in a similar place right now where we're also thinking about

our future and dreaming about our future and thinking about the community that we could be. And my greatest hope is that, in 2115, the mayor of Calgary will be standing at this podium, celebrating the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Alberta Wilderness Association, and she will say "the people of 2015 were thinking about the future, and they left us this wonderful space, and we have to build on their legacy." And I think that's tremendously important. But let's not forget that for quite a long period of time, for nearly thirty-five years if I'm doing the math on my own age and the age of the Alberta Wilderness Association correctly, this wonderful building has been the home of the Alberta Wilderness Association. And that means that this historic space is not just a part of Calgary's built history, and Calgary's education history, but it's also a really important part of our environmental history. We've had champi-

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

### **Transcript of Councillor Druh Farrell's speech:**

I always hate following Naheed, because he's a great speaker, and rousing, and I am so grateful that we are finally starting to recognize our heritage, and First Nations heritage, and where we have a lot to be grateful for. I am very grateful that we have Alberta Wilderness Association, and I'm also very grateful that you have been a loving steward of a beautiful building, for more... almost two generations. So thank you so much for taking care of this building, you deserve it. It's your home now, and it's permanent. And so for the next fifty years, you will be taking care of this building, and then into the future. We need groups like the Alberta Wilderness Association, more than ever. Just about every action that we take as human beings does some sort of damage to the world around us. And when you think of billions more being added to our population, that's a losing proposition, unless we change the way we live our lives. And so Alberta Wilderness Association reminds us that those wild places, that we're losing at an ever-increasing rate, are exceedingly im-

portant. And it makes me believe in a bright future, when I see a room full of people who are able to raise money for a beautiful building. Thank you for the work that you do. Christyann was in our offices...well, it was dogged, dogged, and so you have a lot to be grateful for with your executive director and all the team. So to the board and the executive director and everyone here, thank you for the work that you do.



*Councillor Druh Farrell PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON*

## Transcript of Dick Pharis' speech:

I notice that there are a number of original founding members of the AWA in the audience this afternoon. All of us who started the AWA, back in the late sixties, practiced what we preached, in the sense that we used the wilderness, and hopefully we used it with soft footprints. I was a member, then the director, then the vice president, and then the president. I was president for three years during the early Lougheed years and we went through the east slope hearings, we went through month after month, year after year of interactions with the petroleum industry, who were punching roads up into the front ranges for gas. We ended up after the east slope hearings with a management policy for the eastern slopes of Alberta; that management policy was never an accident of regulations, but it was upheld by the Lougheed government pretty well during the era. This was a pretty exciting time; I'd like to remind you that the US *Wilderness Act* is fifty years old today as well, and that the Montana Wilderness Association is fifty-one years old, so we were in good hands in terms of our neighbours, and here in a timely fashion.

We had lots of help, then, from other organizations: CPAWS, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society; Alberta's Fish and Game Association, under the supervision or under the presidency of Tom O'Keefe and Bob Scammell, who were on our side. We had friends in industry, and many of our original members were in the oil and gas industry, and they all liked to hunt, hike, and fish in the back country of Alberta, and they were all upset and perturbed with what was happening. We had friends within government as well, and one reason that we have Willmore Wilderness Park, just north of Jasper, as pristine as it is now, is because of Fred McDougall who was the deputy minister of lands and forests in that key area. Fred helped keep the Willmore sacrosanct, and it's still a place where you can go lose yourself for weeks on end.



Dick Pharis PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

I turned the reins over to Ray Sloan in 1975, and Vivian, my wife, came on as president somewhat later; but we always lived the wilderness life in the summers and the fall and the springs, and it's been something that we value, value very much. So I'd like to

leave you with hope for the future, and that hope for the future says that we will finally enact some of these wildland recreation areas that look good on the maps, look good in paper, but still need to be regulated further than just policy. Thank you.



Like Marilyn and Heinz Unger, as we look into AWA's future, may that future be as thoughtful and satisfying as the expressions on their faces. PHOTO: © K. MIHALCHEON



## Transcript of Tom Beck's speech:



Tom Beck PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

I won't stand between you and food and drink for very long. It's ah — somebody mentioned... I think one of the previous speakers mentioned that this is an emotional day, and I've been sitting looking at all these old friends, and missing them because some of them are no longer with us as the old members know. But at inception, the people I met — and there was nothing formal about AWA at that time, they were by and large, well they were from every walk of life. They were from urban places, rural places, and they all had one thing in common. I think they had a vision of wilderness in Alberta. And it didn't come out, but it was there, in every one of them. And it was fascinating to watch. And I have been thinking a lot about them during the proceedings. But they all had in common that overarching vision of better consideration and protection for Alberta's wild places and wild things.

And the reaction to this idea wasn't universally accepted. Government in some quarters at least had some concerns over possible constraints on their role and activities. But despite this concern AWA universally earned enough respect among key politicians with the government party at the time, and also the opposition, to prompt them both to ask key

members of the AWA group if they would join the government, both the government in office and the opposition. Now I thought we must be doing something right. Those members didn't accept those invitations. That overarching vision of Alberta was firmly fixed in their minds, and they didn't leave the AWA and take up that offer. And now... another example of the gaining of respect by the AWA: Viv earlier mentioned a deputy minister; he was deputy minister of the department that was most often on the receiving end of our suggestions and criticisms. I went to him and — the UN had offered an environmental award for individuals, for their environmental actions. I went to the deputy and asked him if he would co-sponsor two individuals from AWA for the United Nations award. And he thought about it just for seconds and he said...you know, they've always been fair with AWA and those individuals. And as I recall we put the nominations in and the award was received by the couple from the AWA. And so, you know slowly but

surely we were making an impression, a favourable one.

And here we are, fifty years later, with a tough-but-fair reputation, and we're looking forward to at least another fifty years and you expanded it, Mr. Mayor. Like Cliff Wallis, I don't think I'll be around that long, but we're very fortunate. We're about to have, thanks to our special guests, a permanent home, and we have a professional and passionate staff, and there's no question about that. If you read this addition which came out by coincidence, I think — it came to me in the mail today — it tells you all you need to know about the staff that we have. We have a very effective management, as has been recognized, and always, always, a cadre of top-notch volunteers who hang in there for a very long time sometimes. In fact I'm looking at faces that have been there forever. We've been very fortunate. And so I ask the members and friends and special guests to join me in a toast for AWA.



Ken and Chris Havard, two outstanding examples of the philanthropic spirit that made AWA's purchase of Hillhurst Cottage School possible. PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

# Updates

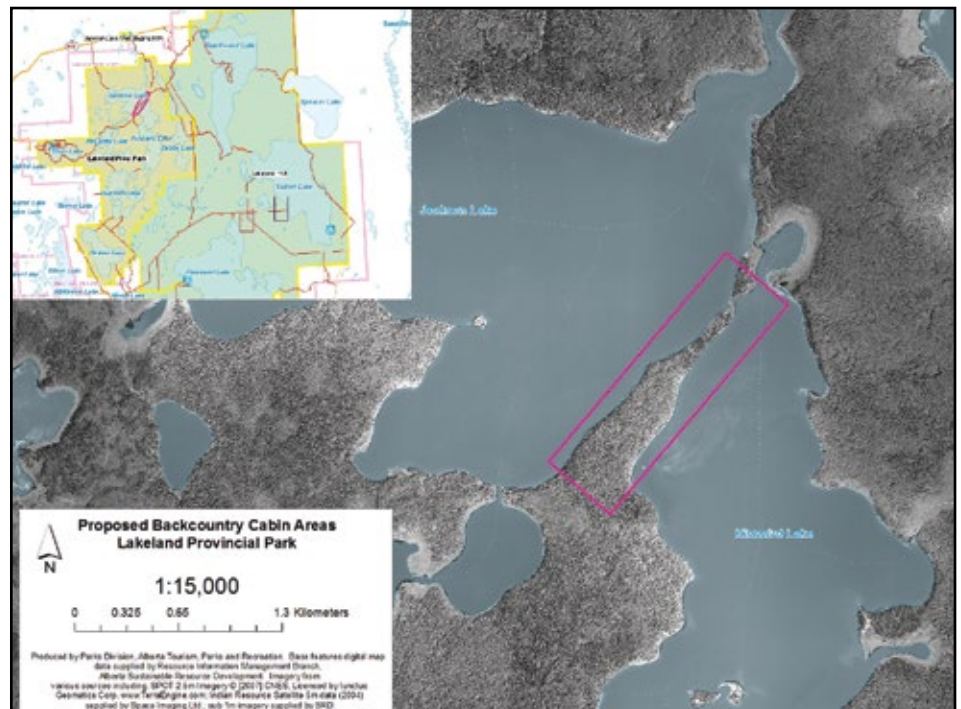
## Lakeland Park's Backcountry Character Recognized in Camping Cabin Decision

AWA applauded Alberta Parks' decision at the end of June 2015 that they would not, after all, build five fixed roof cabins in Lakeland Provincial Park. We sounded the alarm in July 2013 when materials to build cabins were helicoptered in, unannounced, to a site on an isthmus between two lakes in the Park's back country canoe circuit. The resulting outcry from Albertans who cherish the relatively natural state of the canoe circuit resulted in the removal of the materials. Alberta Parks pledged to consult on this issue, in keeping with their stated policy of public consultation on any significant change in infrastructure within a park, and that public consultation occurred in spring 2014.

In its 2015 decision, Alberta Parks said that, while they wouldn't place cabins in Lakeland Provincial Park, they would put 5 cabins in the adjacent Provincial Recreation Area (PRA). The PRA has large car campgrounds on several lakes and places more emphasis, compared to Lakeland Park, on motorized boat and off-highway vehicle recreation. The *Lac La Biche Post* reported that the cabins' location will be finalized shortly and construction will begin this year. Hopefully these cabins will be within existing campground areas, as relatively intact wilderness areas remain in the centre of the PRA.

The Lakeland consultation's 'What We Heard' report by Alberta Parks confirms how important it is for you, a concerned citizen, to provide your opinion. Parks received 159 formal responses (116 against the cabins, 28 in support and 14 neutral) and 66 social media responses (28 against, 27 in support and 11 neutral). Formal comments were discussed in the report, with no distinction made between organizations or individuals.

Most encouragingly, half the comments stated that the wilderness experience in



Alberta Parks recently decided to place camping cabins in the front country of Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area rather than in the Provincial Park's canoe circuit as first proposed. These Lakeland protected areas are roughly 250 km northeast of Edmonton, just east of Lac La Biche. CREDIT: GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Lakeland Provincial Park should be retained. Alberta Parks acknowledged that it is one of the few parks in northeast Alberta that can provide an accessible, genuine wilderness experience, "recognizes that this is unique," and recognizes the proposed location as "backcountry."

The justification for putting cabins in Lakeland PRA is unconvincing. "Alberta Parks will consider front country options for the cabins at various lakes within Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area **as suggested by Albertans.**" [emphasis added] In fact, less than 20 percent of comments suggested the need for any cabins and the PRA already has over 200 RV-compatible campsites. AWA pointed out in its 2014 submission that there are numerous rental cabins in rustic locations within an hour's drive of Lac La Biche. These facilities may be found on Pinehurst Lake (on private lands within Lakeland PRA), Elinor Lake, Whitefish Lake, and in the immediate vicinity of Lac La Biche itself. Our position is that, given

the extensive industrialization of so much public land outside parks, Parks' cabin expansion policy exclude backcountry areas. Cabins would forever alter those areas with an urban flavour.

AWA will also monitor two promises Alberta Parks made arising from public comments on Lakeland Park's overall management. One important pledge is: "Alberta Parks will review the concerns about increased motorized [watercraft] use and potential detrimental effects on the lakes and the aesthetics, and if warranted, research and implement mitigating measures." Second, AWA and others noted that the Park's canoe circuit docks, portage trails, and other trails were in disrepair; scarce financial resources should be used to maintain those facilities instead of destroying the Park's backcountry character. In response, Parks offered the welcome statement that "Alberta Parks is working on and correcting maintenance concerns."

- Carolyn Campbell



## Grassy Mountain Mine Proposal

Benga Mining Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Riversdale Resources Limited, is proposing to develop and operate an open-pit metallurgical coal mine approximately seven kilometres north of Blairmore in the Crowsnest Pass. The company expects to produce a maximum of four million tonnes of coal per year over a mine-life of about 25 years. Ever since the coal mine was first proposed, people have been stirring in the Pass and many conversations about the wisdom of the Grassy Mountain proposal have taken place.

Recently, a loose coalition of individuals, environmental groups (including AWA), locals and landowners has formed the 'Friends of Grassy Mountain.' The purpose of the coalition is to share information, to raise awareness about the risks of re-opening a mine there, and to point out how it will affect adjacent landowners, surrounding communities, and the ecological health of the area. The consensus view of the group is that the overall costs of this mine project outweighs significantly the benefits.

One of the concerns of the group, which AWA has stressed in several letters to both provincial and federal departments, is the threat of contamination to Gold and Blairmore creeks. Both creeks are listed as critical habitat in the westslope cutthroat trout federal recovery strategy; they contain pure-strain populations of this threatened species.

Another related concern AWA has raised is the poor quality of the reclamation done on Grassy Mountain after the previous coal mine shut down half a century ago. Longstanding tailings piles, combined with current exploratory drilling, already may have damaged Gold creek. After several storm events in mid-July, significant amounts of a black substance were found in the creek and eventually made their way into the Crowsnest River. The Alberta Energy Regulator (AER)



*Unidentified black substance in Gold Creek PHOTO: © M. BONERTZ*

has opened an investigation into the matter and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has been notified. Riversdale has not commented publicly on the incident but is assisting AER as required. If this foreshadows what could happen if this mine is approved, both fish and downstream users of these waters may have real, significant, concerns.

The extensive land alterations caused by an open pit mine and the potentially severe adverse effects on the environment require a full review by the Cana-

dian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA). CEAA has started to conduct its environmental assessment for this project proposal with several public consultation phases. The federal Environment Minister just recently announced the assessment will be handed over to an independent review panel. As a result, AWA, as part of the 'Friends of Grassy Mountain,' will engage in the review process.

*- Brittany Verbeek*

## Amisk Alberta's Peace River Valley Faces Another Dam Threat

Amisk Hydroelectric Project Development Corp. (Amisk HP) notified AWA and other stakeholders in June 2015 that they will apply this fall to build a large weir across the Peace River, for a 330 MW hydroelectric power generation facility. They propose to place a 22-metre high weir across the River, about 15 kilometres upstream from the Dunvegan Bridge, creating a 50 kilometre long headpond. The barrier would flood the river valley bottom and slopes, including some rare remaining native parkland vegetation areas both inside and outside of the Dunvegan West Wildland Provincial Park. This would significantly alter water flows that transport materials downstream and allow fish and other organisms to move up and down the river. The Peace River flows into one of the world's largest inland freshwater deltas, the Peace-Athabasca Delta.

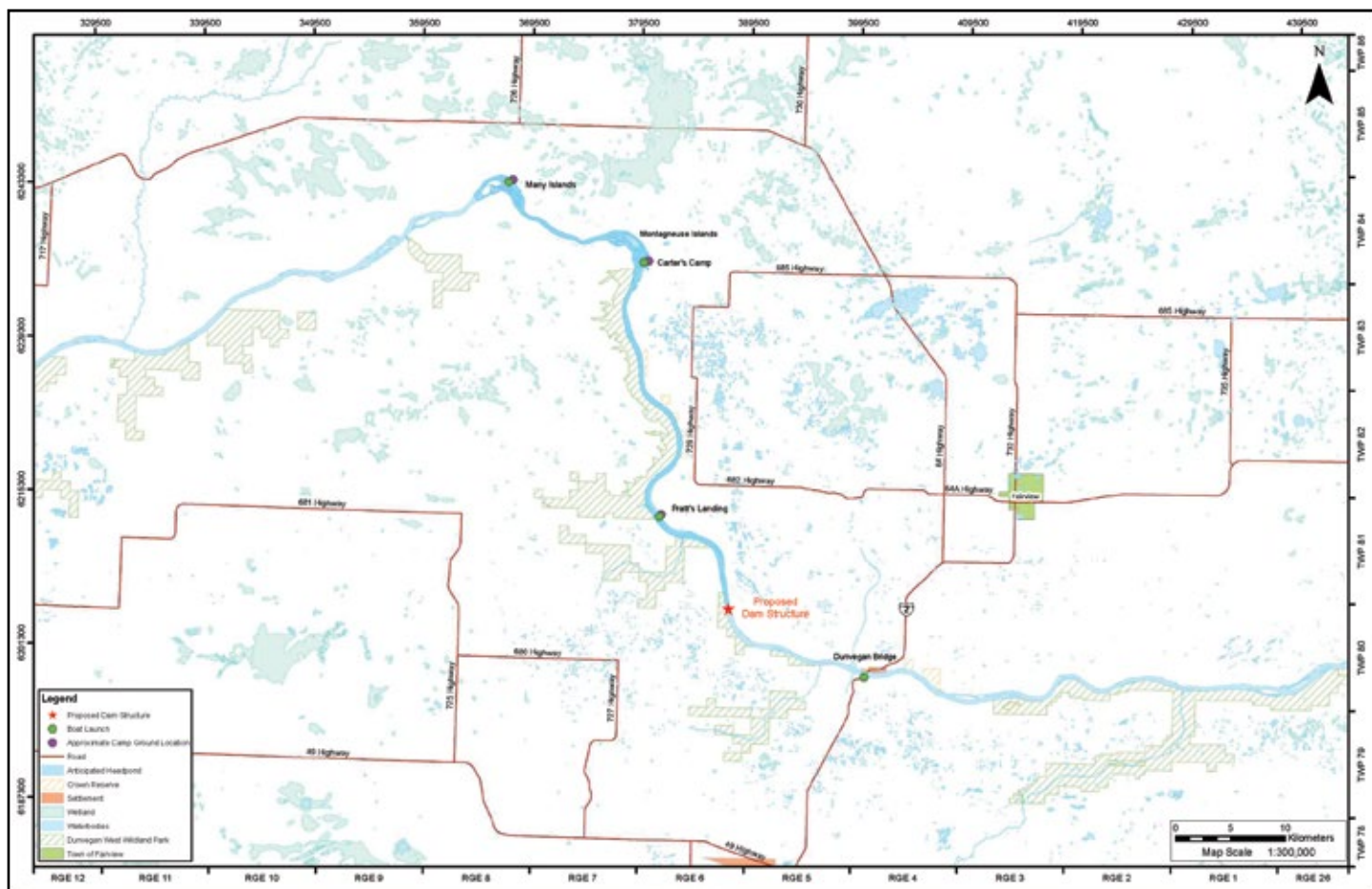
AWA learned of the Amisk project last summer. At that time, TransAlta was seeking a nine-year extension of construction approval for its planned hydro project just upstream from the Dunvegan Bridge. In early 2015, TransAlta withdrew that project, citing substantial information requests from stakeholders on its extension, a potentially costly hearing, and unfavourable project economics (see *WLA* April 2015 updates).

AmiskHP held open houses in Grande Prairie, Fairview, and Peace River in June 2015 on their proposal and met with AWA in July. AWA is concerned about further significant harm to Alberta's Peace River valley aquatic and terrestrial habitat and wildlife. Another hydro barrier will add to BC dams' already considerable impacts. The proposed headpond may affect areas that should be prime candidates for stronger ecological protection in upcoming land-use planning slated for the Lower Peace region.

AWA is also very concerned at the pro-

posed flooding of parts of Dunvegan West Wildland Provincial Park. Wildland Parks are intended to remain backcountry natural areas with a high degree of protection. The Dunvegan West Park was established in 2000 to protect the increasingly rare natural heritage of the region. According to Alberta Parks' site description: "this park includes a unique mixture of grassland, aspen forest and steep-sided creek valleys. Many of the plants and birds here are more typical of the Parkland Natural Region located far to the south. Its bedrock cliffs are home to nesting bald eagles, golden eagles and falcons. Red-sided and wandering garter snakes den along the river. South-facing slopes support typical parkland vegetation, with clones of aspen, shrubs, and grassland communities. Cacti are found on some of the drier sites. The valleys are key year-round habitat for deer and elk."

Alberta can transition to green energy without the significant damage to our vital river



AWA is concerned about fish and wildlife habitat and population impacts from Amisk HP's proposed 22-metre high weir, which will flood the river valley bottom and slopes for 50 kilometres upstream.



ecology that in-stream hydro brings. AWA will continue to voice strong concerns about the Amisk project.

- Carolyn Campbell

## Questioning Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification and its Certifiers

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international, multi-stakeholder, not-for-profit organization that promotes responsible forest management through standard setting, certifying that companies meet those standards, and labelling forest products with the FSC logo to “allow shoppers to choose products that support forest conservation, offer social benefits, and enable the market to provide an incentive for better forest management.” FSC Canada’s vision is that: “Canada’s forests meet the social, ecological, and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations.” In theory, forestry companies benefit from being certified by gaining social licence.

AWA has been a member of the FSC since its inception in 1993 and remains an active member; Cliff Wallis is AWA’s FSC representative. At the beginning, several environmental non-governmental organizations, including AWA, were interested in working with the FSC because it offered stronger certification requirements, from the ecological perspective, than other certification schemes. These requirements included: 1) establishing protected areas 2) developing objective, comprehensive, independent and measurable standards 3) ensuring full transparency, and 4) conducting assessments by independent third-party assessors. However, our recent experience with an Alberta logging company’s FSC certification has left us with serious concerns about whether the FSC process always meets these ecologically-vital expectations.

AWA sent a letter to FSC Canada’s President on July 9, 2015, outlining the need for FSC to take control over the auditing process to ensure it is truly independent of industry. As it stands today, FSC sets the rules and accred-

its independent certifying organizations to carry out the audits of forest management to the agreed set of principles and criteria. Forestry companies then hire any of the accredited certifying organizations and are able to transfer to a different certifier once every five years. When forestry companies who want certification can choose their auditors and, not be required to re-hire auditors whose audits are critical, the potential for significant conflict of interests exists.

AWA’s letter also raised specific concerns with the chosen certifier for Spray Lakes Sawmills (SLS), a logging company with a designated Forest Management Area in the Bow watershed. SLS initially hired Rainforest Alliance’s SmartWood Program as their certifier for their initial FSC audit to become certified before transferring to Bureau Veritas (BV) as their second certifier. SmartWood denied SLS’s first certification attempt. SmartWood certified SLS on their second attempt, after the company took several steps to meet the FSC standards, but with a caveat of SLS improving on four major non-conformances and fifty nine minor ones prior to SmartWood’s next audit. SmartWood closed three of the major non-conformances and one was reduced to a minor non-conformance on their next visit in 2014. SLS decided to hire Bureau Veritas to handle their certification from that point on, so sixty non-conformances had to be reviewed during the transfer process from SmartWood to BV. The BV transfer audit report stated that this was an “extremely high number of non-conformances for a Canadian forest.” Yet BV closed all but one minor non-conformance. This huge discrepancy between the conclusions of two certifying organizations in less than a two year time period between audits, has led AWA to question the standards of FSC certification and the certifiers.

AWA also is concerned about the conduct of Bureau Veritas’ lead auditor and many aspects of both the transfer report and public audit report. AWA was specifically named in the BV report in several places because AWA staff and volunteers made time to take the primary auditor onto several sites of particular concern to AWA and others. These sites were

prime areas for protection, and the type of sites that SLS’s Detailed Forest Management Plan (DFMP) goals suggest should be given special management considerations. Nonetheless, on viewing the logging, our general concerns were dismissed as being land use issues that are the purvey of the Alberta Government, not SLS. The auditor told us, in his view, SLS had followed all government regulations in logging the area and therefore we had no valid issues. Further, he dismissed all questions and concerns about short culverts, non-functioning water dams and no buffers being left around springs, ephemeral creeks or wetland edges as “unfounded,” explaining that the Boreal Standard for logging required no buffering and those complaints were of no concern to him.

The following insulting and derogatory quotes are taken directly from BV’s 2015 Transfer Audit Report and Public Audit Report:

- “The Company operates in a challenging environment being located close to Calgary with high public visibility and **with some very active and often intransigent stakeholder groups.**”
- “There is a small cabal of stakeholders who feel that consultation means capitulation.”
- “The PAC (Public Advisory Committee) included a variety of members, **the cabal of fringe groups are upset** as they are not on the PAC, though a previous member from the cabal quit for reasons unknown.”
- “Had a field trip on Oct 29 with AWA and found most allegations to be unfounded, renewal in the blocks they chose was good, water crossings were fine, wetlands are protected. **They did have land use issues which are not SLS problems.**” [emphasis added]

*Cabal: A secret or private intrigue of a sinister character formed by a small body of persons. Oxford English Dictionary*

To AWA, to dismiss the majority of stakeholder concerns in this manner discredits Bureau Veritas as an independent

FSC certifying company. Nonetheless, this company will be returning in August 2015 to complete another SLS audit to “evaluate conformity with the Forest Stewardship Council’s Canadian National Boreal Forest Standard (version 1.0).”

As for FSC, some communities in Alberta are at increasing odds with forestry operations and do not feel that wood products and industry benefit are worth the public values and resources that intact forests provide. Currently, FSC is developing new International Generic Indicators (IGIs) which will hopefully mandate the incorporation of the value of a range of ecosystem services in light of logging operations that devalue

or destroyed them. Until then these indicators are adopted and FSC addresses our auditing concerns, AWA’s confidence that FSC certified products reflect a high standard in forestry practices and ensure sustainable forest management is shaken.

- *Brittany Verbeek*

## Trail Rebuilding Concerns in Panther Corners

AWA has learned of plans to rebuild trails in Panther Corners, part of the wilderness of the Bighorn Wildland. The trail has been rehabilitating naturally from its historical use as a resource exploration road and from heavy outfitter use from the 1970s through to the 1990s. The area was legally closed to

motorized use in 1986 through Forest Land Use Zone legislation. Successive floods in the last 15 years have altered the river bed and river crossings, curtailing wagon use. While we have not received copies of or information about the formal plan, we have been notified by local area residents that the new plan exceeds the parameters of flood damage rehabilitation. It’s more ambitious and will expand the trail significantly. The trail will be widened to 2.5 metres for horse-drawn wagons and construction will require a significant investment from the 2013 trail flood repair fund. Rebuilding in the headwaters of the Panther River will require heavy equipment for construction as well as multiple watercourse and wetland crossings. In addition, we understand the plans indicate that the trail will be rebuilt in areas not affected by the 2013 flood.

We are deeply concerned that rebuilding and expanding these trails will lead to the urbanization and overuse of the area. AWA does not support rebuilding the trail for anything other than hiking and horseback riding use. Uncontrolled wagon use undoubtedly will cause damage and erosion to the large, often wet, meadow systems in the area. This system has been slowly recovering from past human use and abuse. It’s unacceptable that there has been no broader public consultation or information made available. Upgrading the road for a purpose it was not intended for is not serving the broader public’s interests. Therefore, we have sent a letter voicing our concerns to the Minister of Environment and Parks Shannon Phillips, Deputy Minister of Environment and Parks Bill Werry and Regional Executive for the Red Deer – North Saskatchewan region Randall Barrett. AWA also spoke with Deputy Minister Werry on the matter. As we publish this update, we have not received a reply. Panther Corners is a vital component of the watershed and we strongly believe that it will not be able to sustain the impact of heavy, horse-drawn wagons.

- *Nora Spencer*



Featured  
Artist  
Jacquelyn  
Blight

*"Enchanted Forest",  
Photo Encaustic  
on birch plywood,  
8" x 14"*



Featured Artist  
Jacquelyn Blight



*"Scorched",  
Photo Encaustic  
on cradle board,  
14" x 18"*



*"Windy Peaks",  
Photo Encaustic  
on cradle board,  
11" x 14"*



# Summer / Fall Events

## **Hike: Milk River Ridge with Cheryl Bradley** **Saturday August 29, 2015**

The Milk River Ridge area is located along the Alberta – Montana border comprising of extensive foothills grasslands, wetlands, glacial spillways, and deeply incised ravines with intervening ridges. It's home to a wide variety of flora and fauna and represents one of six large blocks of grasslands left on the glaciated plains of North America. Join Cheryl to experience the wonders of one of the last remaining intact native grassland regions in Alberta.

**Difficulty rating: Moderate**      **Cost: \$20 AWA members, \$25 non-members**  
**Pre-registration required: (403) 283-2025**      **Online: [www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes](http://www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes)**

## **Hike: Fall in the Whaleback with Bob Blaxley** **Saturday, September 19, 2015**

Experience fall colours and vistas in this classic montane landscape, one of the largest remaining examples of this fascinating ecosystem. Join Bob to wander the trails, ridges and valleys and visit ancient pines clinging precariously to the slopes. The Whaleback is home to wildlife such as deer, elk, bears, coyotes and wolves.

**Difficulty rating: Moderate**      **Cost: \$20 AWA members, \$25 non-members**  
**Pre-registration required: (403) 283-2025**      **Online: [www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes](http://www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes)**

**Our Wilderness Around the World Edmonton Speaker Series will start up again this fall with details to come soon! Stay tuned for dates and speakers.**

## **27th Annual Wild West Gala** **Friday September 25, 2015**

The 27th Wild West Gala marks our annual celebration of Alberta's Wild spaces and Wildlife. It is a tradition of friends, colleagues, members and supporters enjoying a great meal and an evening filled with entertainment, conversation, auctions and plain good fun. This event is a fundraiser for the Alberta Wilderness Association and is totally dependent on volunteers and sponsors from the Calgary area to present an evening to remember.

Please join us for a great night out!

**Location: Red and White Club (north end of McMahon Stadium), Calgary**  
**Time: 6:00 p.m.**  
**Tickets: AWA Members: \$150.00 for two/Non-members: \$100.00 each**  
**Pre-registration required: 1 (866) 313-0713**      **Online: [www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes](http://www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes)**

## **Calgary Talk: Soundscape Ecology** **Tuesday, October 20, 2015**

Join Dr. Marcia Jenneth Epstein, University of Calgary Professor, to learn about the field of sound ecology and environmental noise. She will tie in the work of Bernie Krause and others to explore how sound can be used in conservation work.

**Talk starts at 7:00pm, doors open at 6:30 pm**  
**Location: 455 12 Street NW, Calgary**  
**Tickets: \$5.00**  
**Pre-registration required: 1 (866) 313-0713**      **Online: [www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes](http://www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes)**



# Summer / Fall Events

## Munch and Mingle at Snow Valley Edmonton Saturday, October 24, 2015

Save the Date! Come help us celebrate AWA's 50th anniversary as a conservation force in Alberta! We're throwing a party for all our members, supporters, and friends. A fabulous fall bar-be-que with plenty of fun and conversation.

**Location:** Snow Valley, Edmonton

**Time:** 6pm

**Pre-registration required:** (403) 283-2025

**Online:** [www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes](http://www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes)

## Music for the Wild Saturday, October 24, 2015

### Headline Act

**The Four Tenors (A Ukulele Event).** Featuring Jake Peters, Barry Luft, Don Gowan and Nobuo Kawaguchi, The Four Tenors (A Ukulele Event) showcase the breadth of musical worlds the uke can grace. Each player is a masterful musician. Together they will share jazz, folk, blues, pop and other traditions, using fine vocals, lots of humour, various forms of ukulele and amazing playing.

### Opening Act

**Blue Rambler.** Don Gowan, George Campbell & Murray Little play blues-based songs that have strong stories and a solid groove. Their songs are well-aged or are played as if they are. Blue Rambler will get you singing a bit and tapping your feet. Expect to hear tinges of folk, jazz and old country as well as blues.

Please join us for a great night out!

**Music at 7:30pm, doors open at 7:00 pm**

**Location:** 455 12 Street NW, Calgary

**Tickets:** \$20.00

**Pre-registration is highly recommended:** 1 (866) 313-0713

**Online:** [www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes](http://www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes)

## Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Trust Lecture and Awards Evening November 20, 2015

**Save the Date – details will follow!**

## Annual General Meeting November 21, 2015

## Music for the Wild Saturday, November 28, 2015

### Headline Act

**Allan & Arnell.** Alberta musicians Jane Allan and Lance Arnell play songs that will bring a memory back, inspire an adventure & warm your spirits. Acoustic instruments compliment their vocals in all sorts of combinations and in a variety of musical styles: bluegrass, folk, roots and a growing number of original tunes. Their music will take you to the blue sky prairies, into the rugged mountains or into a campfire tale.

### Opening Act

**Diminished Fifth.** Diminished Fifth (Michael and Karen Pollock, Natalie Manzer and Steven Méthot) is all about close harmony whether it be a cappella or multi-instrumental arrangements, all home-grown. Each year they host a non-traditional traditional Christmas benefit show featuring a variety of entertainment, song, music, dance and serious fun all woven together with a story from Steven.

Their set will bring some of that magic "on the road" to us.

**Music at 7:30pm, doors open at 7:00 pm**

**Location:** 455 12 Street NW, Calgary

**Tickets:** \$20.00

**Pre-registration is highly recommended:** 1 (866) 313-0713

**Online:** [www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes](http://www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes)

**For a complete list of AWA hikes and tours go to:** [gowildalberta.ca/product-category/hikes-tours/](http://gowildalberta.ca/product-category/hikes-tours/)



Sage-grouse have been endangered for many years but governments have done very little to eliminate human disturbances in critical sage-grouse habitat.



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

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