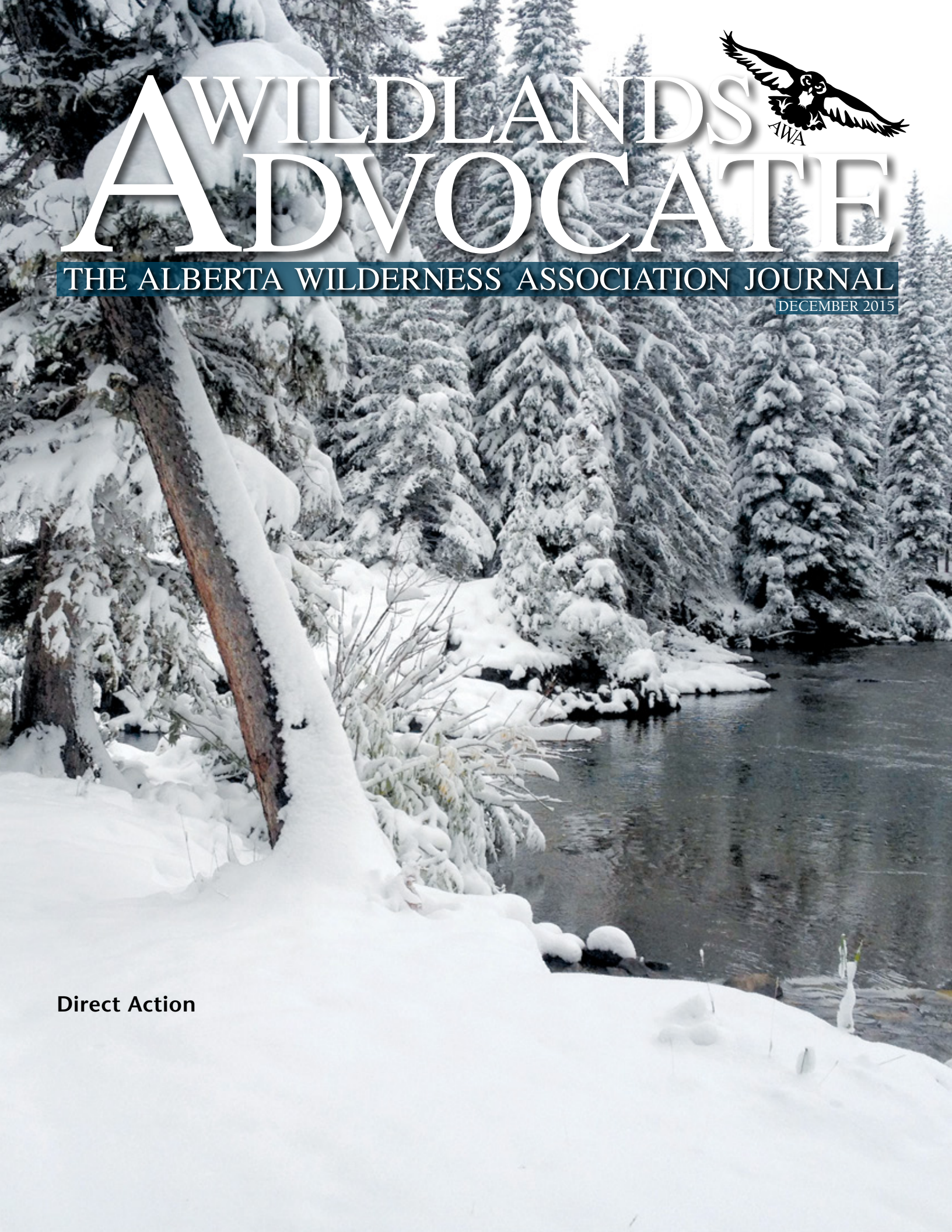

WILDLANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

DECEMBER 2015

Direct Action

C O N T E N T S

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Features

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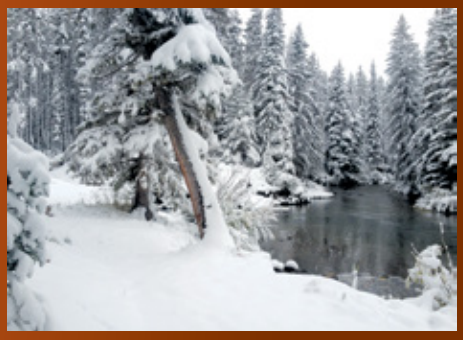
Cover Photo

Racehorse Creek. Dale Morasch's photo of Racehorse Creek reminds us of just how inviting Alberta's wild spaces may be in the winter months. This creek is critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout, listed as Threatened under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*.
PHOTO: © D. MORASCH



Featured Artist: Wendy Morris

Stephen King wrote: "Art is a support system for life, not the other way around."

I create because it is a fundamental part of me that supports the rest of my existence.

I didn't seriously pursue art until I took a week long calligraphy course in 1991. Since then, I've received instruction in watercolor, acrylic, sculpture, airbrush and oil.

Color, texture, pattern....I am in love with the natural world. Often, I only paint a small part of my subject, which fascinates me more than the whole.

I prefer the buttery consistency of oils and their slower drying time allows me to play with the paint a little longer than other mediums. I paint mainly from photographic references in layers of thinly applied paint. The first couple of layers are monochromatic, allowing for additional luminosity. Sometimes the image will attract me and the finished painting will end up monochromatic. More often, my subjects are expressed in vibrant, surreal colours.

My calligraphic projects are a very structured art form: I produce calligraphic scrolls for family histories, illuminated scrolls for The Alberta Order of Excellence and scrolls for the "True Awards" for The Lieutenant Governor's Circle on Mental Health and Addiction.

Please visit www.WildCreationsArtStudio.com to see other examples of my work.

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A Season of Hope

When I was growing up my parents taught me to see the Christmas season as a season of hope. Sure it was a time for family, presents, and parties but the baby whose birth we celebrated symbolized a better tomorrow. So I came to believe the season we'll be in by the time you read these words also was a time for thinking about where we wanted things to go in the next year and further out into the unknown sea of the future. It also was a time to think about what we could do to try to bring those hopes a little closer to becoming realities.

This issue of *Wild Lands Advocate* is about this double-barreled version of hope: what we strive for and what we do to try to realize our ambitions. It's largely about what you might loosely call "Direct Action" – the action that groups and individuals take in order to try to strengthen the place of nature in our world.

Sharon MacDonald starts us on this path with the story of the efforts people in the Ghost River community are making in the name of ecological integrity there. It's impressive and inspiring. The struggle against clearcut logging there, logging the government is allowing to take place over a dramatically shorter schedule, has brought the community together and they have made common cause with their neighbours. Reg Ernst's example of direct action comes in the shape of his post-retirement efforts to better understand the flora of southern Alberta, especially in the Castle, the threats they face, and then to work to change practices on the ground. On the ground is the focus of Lorne Fitch's article. When I read it I see a bit of Howard Beale in my friend. The amount of paper that's been generated in the name of protecting our native fish species is impressive; but he also finds it very disturbing because it hasn't been translated into action on the ground. Lorne's example of direct action came to my attention when the *Globe and Mail* wrote about the research Citizen Fitch has done to try to make the case to government how urgent is the need for action.

AWA is justifiably proud of the many ways it takes direct action in the name of nature. As Sean Nichols points out we've been walking our talk about the damage OHVs do in the Bighorn for years. No agency, public or private, has spent the time and effort that AWA has to produce a comprehensive picture of the good, the bad, and the ugly of trails in the Bighorn. Chris Saunders offers you another example of AWA walking its talk. See his piece about our volunteer efforts to clean up Plateau mountain.

Our efforts to try to make the hope of stewardship a reality wouldn't exist without the generous financial support we receive from you. Christyann Olson offers you a summary of our finances, thumbnail sketches of what they've helped AWA accomplish, and AWA's thanks for your belief in and support of our endeavours.

Finally, the stories of hope I may love the most are those told by or about children. Heather Hadden's story about a Grade One encounter of a batty kind and Brittany Verbeek's summaries of AWA's summer kids camp are those kinds of stories. They speak to and about the future stewards of Alberta's wild spaces. Those stewards and the belief we can leave them a healthy natural world are crucial inspirations to AWA's work now and in the future.

-Ian Urquhart, Editor

Taking Action for the Ghost

By Sharon MacDonald

Once upon a time, a community came together to do what it could for the landscape it loved. We are the Ghost Valley community and this is our story.

The Ghost Valley is a critical watershed for Calgary's 1.6 million people, providing water to the over-allocated Bow River. Just 45 kilometres northwest of Calgary, the Ghost Valley includes lush wetlands, forested foothills and the Rocky mountains. Despite its beauty, all is not well in the Ghost Valley.

And so it begins...

In spring 2014, the small Ghost Valley community was recovering from the flood. A dozen homes were destroyed or severely damaged. Trucks hauling aggregate for a protective berm created 36 massive potholes on Highway 40. Residents felt unsafe and on edge. Rumours swirled. "I hear they're building a dry dam in the Ghost." "Did you know they're fracking 20 wells?" "Did you see the logging they did by Waiparous? Where are they going next?"

On March 19, 2014, 60 concerned citizens gathered at the community hall, joking that we could come home after work to find the forest cut, a dry dam built, and fracking underway. In truth, residents were often the last to know about land use decisions. We were determined to change this, believing people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

The Ghost Valley is part of Spray Lake Sawmill's (SLS) Forest Management Agreement and adjacent quota areas. SLS's maps seemed to indicate that the South B9 Quota along Richards and Jamieson Roads in the Municipal District of Bighorn would be harvested over 20 years, something the community felt it could live with.

In April 2014, MD of Bighorn hosted a meeting regarding SLS's proposed log haul routes. Residents questioned why so many truckloads in a short timeframe. The answer: the harvest we thought would occur over twenty years had been compressed into three.

Supporters of an ecologically-healthy Ghost River Valley gathered at the junctions of Hwy 40 and Hwy 1A.
PHOTO: © M. GLASER

Stop Ghost Clearcut

Shock ran through the community. Vast clearcuts approaching 285ha (700 acres) would open between legacy properties. Trucks would haul more than 5,300 loads of timber over narrow, winding residential roads. Clearcuts would alter wildlife habitat. Highly visible clearcuts and cutover trails would devastate the local tourism industry. The speed and scale of the proposed harvest would endanger water resources and reduce the flood mitigation capacity of this critical watershed above Calgary. And clearcut harvest would impact this Tradi-

tional Land Use area for our Stoney Nakoda neighbours.

Spatial Harvest Sequence, an Alberta forest planning standard, exists to ensure that forest health, ecological services, and socioeconomic values of the surrounding community are preserved. Spatial Harvest Sequence refers to the way in which timber harvest is scheduled to take place in five-year quadrants over a 20-year period. To compress this harvest into three years was too much, too fast, for the community to accept. Nothing made sense until a government spokesperson revealed that favourable timber prices were a deciding factor.

Overnight a group of neighbours came together to contribute their skills in hydrology, geology, technical writing, graphic design, photography, environmental management, and knowledge of the landscape. The group chose the name Stop Ghost Clearcut to indicate opposition to clearcut forestry in this critical watershed. Stop Ghost Clearcut provides information and raises awareness through its website and Facebook page. The group also researches ways to advocate for this landscape. The Stop Ghost Clearcut team's value to the broader community is well recognized, even by those who find its name "too radical."

In December we joined with elders from the Stoney Nakoda Nation in a future Spray Lakes "Sawmills' cutblock for a ceremony for the land and its creatures. PHOTO: © S. MACDONALD

Intentional community

Our community is made up of country residential dwellers who have chosen this landscape for a permanent home; ranchers and legacy owners whose families have stewarded the land for a century; and First Nations whose families have been sustained by this landscape for generations. We each possess a deep love for this land. We come and go, but the land remains.

Land and people are inextricably linked. We are neighbours on a shared landscape, and what we do on the landscape matters. "Land use planning" involves decisions about people and their way of life. Throughout history, land use decisions have caused conflict and suffering. Other communities affected by clearcut logging warned us that the stress of dealing with entrenched government and corporate cultures can play havoc with one's physical and emotional health and can divide a community. From the start, we strategized how we would take care of each other on this journey by building community.

The road ahead

At first, we hoped for a simple solution: Y2Y would help us; AWA would take up our cause; some resident could have quiet words with government or with mill managers. We soon realized we had to do this for ourselves. We had to shed passivity to see ourselves as actors, change makers, and way finders.

With clearcutting scheduled for November 2014, urgency propelled us. Once in motion, we grasped the scope of the problem and identified necessary tasks. Each action generated other possibilities. To use a Chinese metaphor, we were crossing the river by feeling for stones.

The Ghost Valley's reputation for strong opinions and strong emotions led some to doubt we could work together long enough to achieve anything. And yet from day one, we experienced surprising synergy. We constantly reminded ourselves of our identity and purpose: "Together we are the Ghost Valley community and we are trying to be good neighbours to one another. We are simply asking industries that operate in the Ghost Valley to also be good neighbours, showing respect for people and for the land."

Community meetings became a tool for building trust and understanding. Sitting in a circle, we shared where we lived and why we cared. As legacy property owners shared, their impressive history and understanding of the landscape inspired newer arrivals. As the newer arrivals shared, their deep commitment to their new home gained the trust of legacy owners.

Soon community members were getting together between meetings to gather information, walk the land, and engage in projects they designed. Reported back to the original working group, this information was conveyed to the community, generating new activities and connections. Over time, new pockets in the community became aware of the clearcutting and joined in, contributing fresh ideas and fresh energy. Approximately 400 of the Valley's 500 residents indicated their support for the Ghost Valley community's actions.

Knowledge is power and the Ghost Valley community was steadily acquiring both. During most weeks more than 30 people

dedicated many hours gathering information, writing letters, taking pictures, making videos, managing social media, monitoring maps, walking cutblocks, spreading the word, and meeting with decision makers. This "just happened" as people stepped forward to offer what they could. Each of us had a unique contribution to make, ensuring our role as a valued member of the Ghost Valley community. Later we discovered that this method of social change is called a community-organizing approach.

Milestones

Public pressure led the MD of Bighorn to postpone road access for a full year. We used the time to educate ourselves, raise awareness, build partnerships, and press our concerns on the government.

- **December 2014:** A press release re: trumpeter swans, species of special concern, led to a chain of events in which 150 directly-involved people (100 of them grade four students) secured buffers for Kangienos Lake, the swans' nesting site.
- **January-October 2015:** With the help of speakers Robert Sandford, Kevin Van Tighem, and Karsten Heuer, Calgarians and Cochranites became involved supporters.
- **May 2015:** Miraculously an NDP government was elected. We hoped timber harvest plans would be reconsidered.
- **September 2015:** Knowing Saddle Peak Trail Rides may not survive clearcut logging, Ghost Valley community members Dave and Jacquie Richards offered trail rides and roast beef dinner to neighbours. We gathered to enjoy this beautiful intact landscape one last time.
- **July-October 2015:** We advocated tirelessly with our new government and hosted a town hall with our new MLA Cam Westhead. We submitted our petition with the names of 1,363 Albertans calling for a reconsideration of timber harvest plans.

Giving up the Ghost

On Tuesday, October 20, three of us met Minister of Forestry Oniel Carlier, urging him to reconsider timber harvests approved by the previous PC government. The Minister seemed dismissive, telling us to take future concerns to Forestry staff.

Simultaneously in the Ghost Valley, outfitter Dave Richards and conservationist Kevin Van Tighem headed out to ride Lesueur Ridge. They were shocked to find the area being clearcut, the recreational trail up the ridge impassable. Kevin documented this experience in a Facebook post which went viral. Media broadcast the story throughout western Canada.

The Minister's apparent lack of interest coupled with the clearcut harvest of the area's most scenic viewpoint were huge blows to the community. On October 31, 75 Ghost Valley community members and supporters rallied against the government's decision to give up the Ghost. One year earlier, we could not have imagined ourselves as activists. Now there seemed no other choice.

More bad news

November 10, 2015 dealt the Ghost another blow. Under great pressure, the Council of MD of Bighorn offered SLS a Road Use

Agreement for Jamieson Road. Residents believe logging trucks on this narrow, winding residential road endanger public safety. Rallies on November 14 and 21 again saw people waving signs. Public pressure has impressed government and industry with the need to find another haul option. Residents remain hopeful that an eleventh hour deal with a private landowner might transpire, providing a safer situation for residents of Jamieson Road.

Not afraid of the dark

As clearcutting begins, the Ghost Valley community is filled with sadness and anger. These troubling emotions come from our sense of connection to the land. We do not apologize for our passion or our grief. Grief is the price of love and there is nothing wrong with love.

One year ago, we wrote: "We go into this with our eyes open, knowing we are not likely to save that which we love. But that will not stop us from trying. We will look our children and our grandchildren in the eyes, and say, 'We tried our very best.'" As Evelyn, a character in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, said: "The only real failure is the failure to try. And the measure of success is how we cope with disappointment… We came here, and we tried. All of us, in our different ways… We get up every morning, we do our best. Nothing else matters."

We know what it is to pour ourselves into something when success is not guaranteed. Since we did not save the trees, what did we actually achieve? Most certainly, meetings with Forestry and with Spray Lake Sawmills would not have happened without the community's efforts. Public pressure has led to redesign of some cut blocks. We have mitigated harm along the road to headwaters conservation management.

Failing to get the government to order a pause in logging the Ghost while it considers new information (a Compartment Assessment) was a huge blow, but our fight for headwaters conservation management is just getting started. The Ghost Valley community has shown government and industry that doing things the same way they've always been done is no longer good enough. Today's citizens expect decision making to reflect the public's values. Citizens are finding their voice and co-creating their future together in a nonlinear process. The impacts of these shifts have not yet been fully felt. Anything is possible!

Assessing the future…or the past of logging in the Ghost?

We are not alone

While things have not worked out yet as we hoped, today we ended up knowing each other better and with the sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We proved that when the right people come together in constructive ways with good information, they find strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the community, working together to magnify their individual efforts a hundredfold. Our community will now be the medicine for disappointment, grief and anger.

We continue to care for one another. On Sunday, November 29, as the South B9 timber harvest began, we came together to grieve and to offer our support to one another. And on Friday, December 4, we gathered on the land with our Stoney Nakoda neighbours who offered ceremonial blessings for the creatures who have no voice. It was an honour to stand beside our neighbours as they shared their traditions for making peace with what for many of us are heartbreaking circumstances.

We know that preserving this landscape depends upon a strong community, working together for the common good. As a caring community, as a community of people that care – for one another, for our shared landscape – we can find joy and purpose in uncertain times. We are not alone. We are grounded in the landscape and in each other. We are home.

Please visit www.stopghostclearcut.com for more information.

Sharon MacDonald, RSW, M.A. Counselling, moved to the Ghost Valley in 2009, recovering from cancer treatment and adjusting to the long-term effects of treatment. She believes this life-giving landscape and the compassion of its people enabled her to heal. She is grateful for the steadfast support and kindness of neighbours, making it possible for her to undertake this leadership role, a first for her since cancer.

Not Your Average Retirement Path:

Studying the Natural Systems of Southern Alberta

By Reg Ernst

"We must be clear-sighted in beginnings, for, as in their budding we discern not the danger, so in their full growth we perceive not the remedy."

Montaigne, Essays

In 1988, after working in the public service for more than 20 years, I decided to take advantage of an early retirement program the government introduced. The program offered up to two years of retraining at an educational institute so I enrolled in an agricultural program at Olds College. At the time I owned a small hobby farm of 70 hectares near Leduc. There I grew hay and raised some horses, in part because I enjoyed trail riding in the mountains.

At the time studying agriculture seemed like a good fit for my retirement plans but it soon became apparent that my biggest interest was in environmental science, not agriculture. Studying the relationship between plants, animals, soils, and climate (i.e. ecology) became my primary interest at Olds College. What I learned at Olds just whet my appetite for further studies, so I transferred to the Range Resources Program at Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman Montana.

I enrolled in all of the ecology courses offered at MSU; my favourite was alpine ecology with wildlife ecology a close second. We did the alpine ecology course at an elevation of about 3,000 metres on the Beartooth Plateau near Yellowstone National Park. I always treasured being in the high mountain passes whether I was on foot, on skis, or on horseback, but the alpine ecology course really cemented, maybe intensified, my love for the alpine. I love studying alpine vegetation because non-native plants are still absent from high elevation habitats. I say still, because unfortunately, that could change given climate change and the ability of plants to adapt.

While at MSU I did an independent study in the Spanish Peaks Wilderness Area southwest of Bozeman. I collected data to analyze what impact camping was having on plant and soil features at high elevation campsites of approximately 3,000 metres. During this study, I developed a special interest in whitebark pine. My interest in this pine, like its endangered status, continues today. Some study sites I accessed by traveling across Ted Turner's bison ranch southwest of Bozeman. I admired Ted's management policies because he believed that what is good for fish is good for the watershed. Improving fish habitat was central to his management philosophy. At that time, his distaste for cattle and his love of bison was well known. Riding across his ranch and seeing a large herd of bison silhouetted on a distant ridge was a thrilling sight. Easements on his ranches were a great step forward for conservation both in Montana and New Mexico.

With some knowledge brings the realization of how little we know. Near the end of my undergraduate program at MSU, I accepted an offer to do a graduate program at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. After two years, I graduated with an MSc in Range Ecology (minor in Wildlife Management). My thesis work on woodland ecology taught me about research methods. As part of my graduate work, I supervised a wildlife project on Ted Turner's ranch near Truth and Consequences, New Mexico. It so happened that the Turners and Carters visited the ranch during our study, but they failed to invite us to the ranch house for coffee…

When my wife and I moved to Lethbridge in 1995, I hoped to find a meaningful job, but work for an old guy with a young degree was in short supply at that time. Volunteer work was a good option because I wanted to contribute, and I also wanted to put into practice some of the research methods I studied at university. I learned of the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition's (CCWC) efforts to protect the Castle area so I volunteered with them.

My first visit to the South Castle valley with Dave Shepard was disillusioning. Observing the negative impacts from the various users in the area made me think of Garret Hardin's essay "Tragedy of the Commons." The area was being used and abused with no apparent regard for conservation. As in the commons, there was no incentive for users to practice restraint or conservation. It seemed that the provincial government had abdicated its responsibilities and was prepared to ignore or accept the obvious damage the area was suffering from. If government officials thought users would self-regulate their behaviour to maintain ecological integrity they were mistaken badly. One obvious problem was the surface damage caused by various high

impact activities. A second problem was the lack of native grass communities along the South Castle river. Under decades of heavy grazing, native species had been replaced by weeds and introduced species such as Timothy (*Phleum pratense*) and Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*).

We (the CCWC) worked with Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) to make some positive grazing changes to the area, but challenging the combined forces of government, industry, and special interest groups over other issues was like us taking a knife to a gunfight. I suspect the special interests had strong political support from Premier Klein and Environmental Protection Minister Lund although at the local level (SRD in Blairmore) I think support for conservation was quite strong.

Riding out of the South Castle valley one day, I saw a group of ungulates high up on the slopes of Whistler Mountain. Damn! I thought, those look like cattle. Then I pondered: what the heck would cattle be doing way up there? Dave Shepard and I returned a few days later and confirmed that some yearlings were using the area. Subsequent stocking of the area was with cows and calves because they are less inclined to go exploring. Call me a conservationist – I had a problem accepting the fact that cattle were allowed to graze on public lands in alpine.

Later surveys in the Front Range Canyons revealed conditions similar to those in the South Castle (i.e. overgrazed stream corridors). There is good news and bad news in the canyons, however. The bad news is that the valley bottoms are trashed; the good news is that the upper slopes still contain relatively pristine rough fescue communities. The reason these fescue communities are still relatively pristine is that the cattle prefer to hang out along the creek rather than go upslope. With respect to grazing then SRD calculated the Animal Unit Months (AUMS) available in an area; an AUM is the amount of forage a cow/calf pair will consume in a month. While SRD's calculations included all the available or potential grazing area the cattle don't always oblige when it comes to their grazing. They prefer the areas adjacent to the stream corridors. Consequently, stream corridors are severely overgrazed while upland sites are relatively untouched.

I observed similar conditions along the stream corridors in the Cypress Hills during a rare plant survey conducted in 1999. Most of the stream drainages were severely overgrazed while the cattle avoided upland sites. The Range Management Specialist of that time told me that he didn't control the grazing schedule, the ranching community did. Ironically, poorly managed grazing has conserved some relatively pristine rough fescue communities in southern Alberta, but in the process, stream corridors have been sacrificed.

As stated previously, cattle are normally reluctant to travel upslope but in some Front Range Canyons they follow the stream corridors up into the alpine. Perhaps they do that to escape insects or to find more succulent forage. Again, we worked with the SRD and the ranching community to address the alpine issue. Some ranchers were quick to cooperate while others were not. Preventative barriers were installed in two of the canyons (Yarrow and South Drywood), but maintaining the fencing was an ongoing problem. Seeing cattle in the alpine seems like a sacrilege to me; it's a sight we should neither get used to or accept. I hope Minister Phillips will come to that view. Surely she can't think it's ecologically responsible to let Bessie and Molly roam the Castle alpine as shown on the June cover of *Wild Lands Advocate*.

For several years, I was the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC) steward for the candidate Big Sagebrush Natural Area (BSNA). Our annual hike in June always revealed a multitude of wildflowers and upslope plant communities. Both rare plants and rare plant communities are common on the BSNA. I dubbed the hike "the good, the bad, and the ugly." The good was the beautiful and relatively intact native plant communities on the slopes of the BSNA; the bad was the overgrazed valley bottoms; and the ugly was the eroded scars left by dirt bikes and quads on the slopes of Whistler Mountain and elsewhere.

The roots of all management and development evils are externalities. They are so bad because failing to internalize all costs results in significant future costs whether they be environmental, social, or economic. For example, activities such as clear cut logging, overgrazing, high impact recreation, and improperly regulated heavy industry would not occur if the costs of these activities were included in proper cost/benefit analyses. The analyses would recognize the costs and would restrict or prevent the activities from taking place. Multiple use management (what more frustrated conservationists might call "rape, pillage, and burn") has high

Providing the location of cushion townsendia (Townsendia condensate) during a rare plant survey in the Castle
PHOTO: © C. OLSON

Photographing cushion buckwheat (Eriogonum ovalifolium) PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

external costs because the attempt is made to extract every unit of resource possible from the natural system. People might argue this is an efficient use of natural resources but they fail to recognize or deliberately ignore how destructive (and costly) it can be. Much of the damage caused by multiple use is permanent, trying to undo that damage is like trying to unfry an egg.

Watershed damage is a major problem in multiple use systems because non-native plants, roads, trails, clear cut areas, and eroded scars allow for rapid runoff which damages the fishery, spreads weeds, causes downstream flooding, and reduces late season water flow. A healthy native plant cover reduces surface runoff allowing the water to infiltrate, to be released gradually over time. This improves both water quality and late season flows. Would the massive flooding of 1995 have been mitigated with better management in the Castle area? One would think so.

Long term planning without external costs would minimize environmental problems. But alas, our society doesn't think or function that way. Too many plans maximize short term benefits without giving serious consideration to the future. What will the Castle look like in the future? Will the roads and wellsites be decommissioned and be adequately reclaimed? Will Shell and other industries provide the funding for proper reclamation or will many of the roads and trails be left intact for continued use? Will natural disturbance (like fire) be allowed to occur? Will the taxpayers get stuck with the bill? They usually do. Is restoring rather than reclaiming possible in some areas? Maybe: narrow corridors such as roads and trails will revegetate naturally in the absence of disturbance; invasive species, however, are always a problem.

I view functioning natural systems with joy, but impaired ones with dismay. Even the backcountry areas of the national parks are damaged. Overgrazed meadows, eroded trails, and weedy corrals were problems I observed during years of horse packing in the mountains.These problems are avoidable with proper management. Shortly after graduating from New Mexico State, I submitted a proposal to do a PhD on backcountry grazing management. Although the proposal was well received at the local level, Ottawa declined to support it.

Perhaps the most interesting project I did in the Castle was surveying high elevation sites for whitebark pine. I had excellent help from Peter McDermott, a university student from England. He did his undergraduate thesis on our summer's work. We used methods developed by the Whitebark Pine Ecosystem Foundation to collect data on whitebark pine stands including: tree size and density, blister rust infection, and site information such as location, elevation, slope, and aspect. More than 80 percent of the trees we surveyed were infected. Peter often commented that had his university known of some of the precipitous off-trail hiking we did, it would have recalled him to England immediately. But he also said that his time in the Castle was absolutely the best part of his university program. I'm sure he'll always remember the special character of that place.

In subsequent years, I continued to work with both whitebark and limber pine trying to determine their potential as reclamation species. Results were limited in my early work. But a few years ago, Randy Moody (an ecologist from Kimberley, BC) and I established both whitebark and limber pine plots on Prairie Bluff using seedlings and applying various treatments. In 2016, we need to collect and analyse the data from those plots. I am hopeful and optimistic that our results will show that both whitebark and limber pine can be viable reclamation species on some sites.

Being a member of AWA has been a positive experience for me. Through Christyann's initiative, AWA supported and administered several of the projects I did in the Castle area. And for several seasons, AWA members joined me on high elevation hikes to some of the more remote areas of the Castle. Relaxing in camp one evening in the upper South Drywood Canyon, we saw two beautiful blonde quadrapeds within a few hundred metres of camp. It was a thrilling sight, particularly for those seeing a grizzly for the first time; for me, it was the first time I had seen grizzlies with such light coloring.

The adage: "Find a job you love and you will never have to work another day in your life" seems so true at times. Deciding to take early retirement and go to university was so right for me. I consider my time at university and then working as an ecologist one of the best parts of my life. I was so lucky to have had that opportunity. It allowed me to be part of the environmental community, particularly AWA, and it also opened the door for much of the volunteering I have been doing since I graduated from university.

Over the years, I did quite a lot of horse packing. My horse and I had a relationship that lasted longer than most marriages, but after nearly 30 years together, health issues (hers not mine) made it necessary to have her euthanized. Going to the mountains just wasn't the same after that. Now I live in Camrose and although I miss having the mountains nearby, I do enjoy hiking the wooded trails on the slopes of the small valley which bisects the city. I've learned to ignore the smooth brome (an invasive forage grass) so I can enjoy the abundance of native plant communities in the valley.

Wheel Spinning:

A Productive Path to Protect Native Trout?

By Lorne Fitch, *P. Biol.*

How does one measure progress in conservation? Aldo Leopold wisely pointed out: "The only progress that counts is that on the actual landscape of the back forty." In the wake of native trout management plans and recovery strategies one needs to chart the progress towards moving bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout from the brink to a safer place. Obligations to trout conservation have no meaning without action. And sometimes we can't wait for governments to do the right thing; we have to act on our own and trust that our actions will prompt others to follow.

A Glacial Process

Carl Hunt, retired fisheries biologist and constant campaigner for trout conservation, points out that dire signals about bull trout were recognized before 1980.In the early 1980s the Alberta Fish and Game Association introduced the slogan: "Save the Bull Trout." Provincial fisheries biologists provided management plans and wrote recovery plans in the mid-1980s.

A clarion call to action was sounded in the early 1990s and a "Friends of the Bull Trout" group formed to focus attention on the plight of the species. Status reports throughout the range of bull trout confirmed suspicions, papers were written, and conferences were held. We were building a sense of collective angst and need to take action to the issue.

Another slogan was coined, "No Black – Put it Back," to alert anglers about misidentifying bull trout as brook trout. Bull trout were too scarce and too precious to catch and keep. Signs were posted advising people they were in "Bull Trout Country." The dedicated bunch also gave the species some political support, by encouraging the provincial government to make bull trout our provincial fish species.

A "Management and Recovery Plan" was written in 1994; in 1995 bull trout were protected from angler harvest. By 2002, over two decades after the red lights started flashing, the slow wheels of government had deemed bull trout a "Species of Special Concern." A status report was completed in 2009, followed by a conservation and management plan in 2012. By this time bull trout were designated as "threatened."

Some 35 years after the warning bells for bull trout began to ring we are now at a point where the province is launching the initiation of the recovery strategy. Hopefully this strategy is in the nick of time and not too late.

The chronology of events leading to action on the westslope cutthroat trout file is similarly glacial. By 1996 a loss of 30 percent of cutthroat range was noted in Banff National Park, followed by warning signals from the Oldman watershed in 1997. A status report completed in 2006 led to the species being designated as "threatened" in the same year. Three years later, in 2009, a multi-stakeholder recovery team was established. This group worked for four years to complete a recovery plan in 2013 with endorsement from the provincial government.

One can't be critical of the energy, experience, and biology that went into trout management plans and recovery strategies. The test though, as Leopold pointed out, is whether any of this hopeful text is being translated into things on the ground, in watersheds and on streams where these imperiled trout species live.

For example, designating critical habitat for cutthroat trout was delayed for over a year by the federal government. It took a regime change in Ottawa and legal action by the Alberta Wilderness Association and Timberwolf Society to achieve this bit of protection.

I have learned the approach involving status determination, recovery strategy preparation, and finally action plan work is so long and tedious that a species can probably go missing before anything concrete is actually agreed to and undertaken. Based on my observations these "recovery teams" are where the victim's recovery is overseen by a tribunal that includes the perpetrators of its demise. It is a quintessentially Canadian affair, I think; one of abject fairness where, if you haven't caused the problem, how can you be part of the solution?

The length of time for these recovery teams to provide a product is worrisome. It seems like the time spent debating recovery is always far longer than the time it takes for industry to win approval for a project that could push the species further and faster on its path of decline.

At every juncture in this tortuous path, there is a tendency for many participants to retreat to their corners with anticipation amid hopeful hype about a sense of stewardship for the future. In retrospect a

Ineffective effort to prevent excessive runoff from entering a tributary of Hidden Creek. PHOTO: © L. FITCH

cloak of naiveté blankets discussions and offers a comforting sense recovery strategies will work or are working.

One should question whether this work makes much difference in how the watersheds that these trout hang on in are treated. The contrast between what was said and agreed to by the department and what happens at ground level may be striking. It is as if no one outside the fisheries staff has read, understood the commitment to recovery efforts, and has thought about the application to land use. By land use I focus especially on logging, OHV use, and random camping.

Too Polite?: The Message of Management and Recovery Plans

These plans are too polite when it comes to the notion threated fish species are likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors that led them to their perilous status. This likelihood needs to be explicit, not implicit. Surely the point of recovery is not to maintain them on some razor's edge of existence but to allow populations to expand to the point they are robust enough both to survive and thrive within large portions of their historical range.

Management and recovery plans have been endorsed by the provincial government through the responsible minister. One would think it reasonable to presume they are binding on all parts of the provincial government. The documents are, in effect, agreements not to let these threatened species plunge into the endangered category. They should be an implicit contract to pull the species back from the brink that all branches of government should respect.

I don't think this is how these plans are regarded. Instead they say this: "Do what you can to stop making things worse, and try to make things better." This is couched in more scientific or administrative language such as:

- Cumulative effects assessments leading to thresholds for linear disturbance and percentage watershed disturbance.
- Water Act reclassification of key streams to Class "A" to protect critical habitats, especially spawning streams and elimination of "Green Zone Exemptions" for stream crossings.
- Identify sediment sources caused by roads and other land use activities for remediation.
- Ensure hydrologic response of key watersheds is not altered by land use activities.
- Change the guidelines that govern land uses (especially the Timber Harvest Operating Ground Rules) to ensure higher levels of protection to fish, using empirical evidence to meet specific targets for habitat maintenance.
- Develop habitat restoration plans that adequately protect critical habitats.
- Increase efforts in fish population and habitat monitoring.

What is being done on the Ground?

Maybe we should trust that real actions and real progress are being made. But, I'd suggest you indulge whatever skepticism you may have and get out there. If you go into the woods today, you're in for a big surprise. So, in my case, I analyzed the Oldman watershed. This is a summary of what the ground there looks like to me.

I used observations of land use intensity, frequency, and additive effects to assess the progress on the ground towards recovery efforts for bull trout and cutthroat trout habitat in the Oldman watershed. This included 17 streams in the upper Oldman, 15 streams in the Crowsnest, 11 streams in the Castle, six in the Waterton, two in the St. Mary and three in the Willow Creek watersheds. The results from those 54 streams and rivers was not encouraging.

The biggest impact in most watersheds was from the sheer number of roads, trails, seismic lines, and pipeline right of ways. The linear density (km/km²) and number of stream crossings contributes to erosion, sediment transport, and hydrological changes to all these watersheds. The use of this network of access routes by OHVs and other vehicles seems unabated and growing. For those watersheds where linear density has been inventoried, this exceeds the ecological thresholds for both bull trout and cutthroat trout by orders of magnitude.

If unregulated OHV activity, including commercial motorcycle races, is the symptom, the cause is resource extraction, notably logging, but also petroleum development and past and proposed coal mining. The network of roads and trails continues to grow, not shrink.

Historically, logging was the largest land use footprint in most of these watersheds.

Apart from the Castle, where logging has been terminated by park designation, logging continues in most other watersheds containing threatened fish species. Fish in the Castle aren't out of the woods yet, with hundreds of kilometres of old logging roads still used by frenetic OHV users.

Despite a bull trout management plan and a cutthroat trout recovery strategy, logging of sensitive watersheds proceeds, seemingly without concern for these threatened species. Logging (and roading), through excessive linear disturbance and massive sediment loading, have reduced essential bull trout and cutthroat streams to a lowest common denominator status. Instead of treating bull trout and cutthroat trout as threatened species, entitled to extra care and protection the, professional foresters and managers ignore them, as if they already did not exist.

Hidden Creek, the epi-centre for bull trout spawning in the Oldman watershed was logged without appropriate stream buffers applied. Immediately following logging (and the 2013 flood) redd counts for bull trout in Hidden Creek dropped from about 100 per year to a mere fifteen.

Allison Creek, one of the few Crowsnest tributaries still holding cutthroat trout was logged, again with significant deviations from the minimal ground rules. The logging road had, in one location, barely a three metre buffer, when it is supposed to have a 100 metre one. The slope slumped and sediment has been bleeding into the creek more or less continuously for several years. Remediation efforts are a bad joke.

In Star Creek, subject to a questionable research effort to increase stream flows with logging, the Forest Service changed the rules to downgrade the *Water Act* designation of stream side buffers to the lowest level possible to allow the maximum amount of timber to be removed. This was done with an imperfect knowledge of the pure cutthroat population in the stream.

Logging is planned along White Creek which contains the highest density of cutthroat trout of any system within the historic range of the species. It should be a reference stream, set aside as a benchmark, not another site for logging.

Proposed coal mining in the Crowsnest watershed is a new, significant threat to remnant, pure cutthroat populations in that watershed. Past, unremediated mining activities add to the cumulative impact of other land uses. Plans to mine again on Grassy Mountain north of Blairmore have the dubious distinction of negatively affecting not one but two cutthroat populations, in Gold and Blairmore creeks. Exploration activity is already under investigation for possible infractions.

Most of the streams I observed had multiple perturbations, including random camping, water diversions, commercial recreational development, and grazing. There are no safe havens left, no refuges from logging, with the possible exception of the Castle if its newly conferred park status supports a range of land uses consistent with the common sense meaning of "fully protected."

The Pit of Policy

So where are we at with the policy level decisions, the marching orders for departmental staff? The direction provided in the management plans and recovery strategies spoke to a number of things that needed to be done and changed to allow these trout species to persist. So, as of this writing how many have been completed, set in policy stone, translated into guidelines, explained to those whose responsibility it is to accomplish these directives?

When a coalition of conservation groups raised the question of progress on protection of bull trout and cutthroat trout with the former minister of the then Department of Environment and Sustainable Development on seven areas identified in management and recovery plans the answers were telling. No recommendation had been followed through on, some were in "early stages", in others "discussions have occurred with departmental staff" and mostly things were being "planned." Charitably, this is all code for no progress. Even something as simple as an administrative change to designate critical streams as Class "A" under the *Water Act*, the highest level of protection afforded by provincial legislation, seems to have encountered a road block.

This example of clearcut logging in Hidden Creek illustrates all too well why excessive sedimentation threatens this SARA-designated critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout. PHOTO: © L. FITCH

Giving the government some credit, there are plans to begin planning for the linear footprint, recreation management, cumulative effects and biodiversity. But, these ideas are barely off the drawing board and timelines to their completion, if they ever are completed, are unclear. At some point we have to do something. Otherwise we navigate through a sea of planning where no wind fills the sails to take us to the port called progress.

The aggravating thing about the planning leading to policy is this: When all is said and done, more is said than done.

Lights at the End of the Tunnel

Although it's easy to become despondent over the lack of measureable progress by government, there are hopeful signs from actions undertaken by non-government groups. The Oldman Watershed Council

(OWC) initiated a headwaters project (the Headwaters Action Plan) to deal with issues like cumulative effects, linear disturbance and thresholds for land use activity. They have made substantial progress in shining a bright light on these issues, often in the face of government intransigence and lack of support.

The OWC, Ghost Watershed Alliance, Trout Unlimited and Cows and Fish have all taken on restoration projects to aid both bull trout and cutthroat trout. They have successfully mobilized support from volunteers, sometimes industry and OHV groups, to replant riparian areas and stabilize eroding banks.

But, like Aldo Leopold's bird dog, who would point meadowlarks when there were no grouse available, there is a tendency in conservation work for our own form of displacement behavior. Even though the largest issues related to biodiversity conservation and maintenance of landscape integrity are ones of policy and legislation these tend to be difficult ships to turn. This is especially so when arms of government refuse to recognize the reef of imperilled species approaching. So, we divert to postage sized restoration projects, looking for cooperation and collaboration with other like-minded organizations and congratulating ourselves over the small, but largely insignificant, scale of such endeavors.

As we inch forward a few metres at a time with band aids of restoration, kilometres and townships of the landscape are transformed by industrial practices. For every kilogram of sediment arrested with a restoration project, tons pour off of poorly constructed, badly placed, and inadequately maintained roads and trails.

Where to from Here?

I've come to the conclusion that in forested watersheds trout have only two real enemies – industrial scale, clear cut logging and roads. Maybe someday we will discover these are also the enemies of what we can become, especially because of the cumulative impacts of too many activities crammed into a limited landscape.

The Eastern Slopes are a trout forest, a watershed forest, maybe even a recreational forest but not a commercial forest. To treat the Eastern Slopes as a commercial forest is to fail to meet other, more important societal and environmental needs, including maintenance of native trout, the indicators of effective landscape management. Yet, the Alberta Forest Service continues to fan the dying flames of commercial logging, ransacking the forest to keep an industrial welfare recipient alive.

There is a troubling pattern of behavior – minimalist and unproven guidelines, the least onerous, or no monitoring, insufficient oversight and compliance, foot dragging once problems are identified and then cheap, insubstantial, and cosmetic solutions.

History wasn't made yesterday – it is still being made today. Trout declines continue. History teaches lessons about limits. Our watersheds, our wildlife, our threatened fish species will not survive a combination of benign neglect, sluggish actions and the cumulative pounding of industrial and recreational activity.

The key is a policy decision (and the will to enforce it) that would see no further habitat loss in watersheds containing native trout followed by an aggressive habitat restoration program. The policy would be informed by science, the precautionary principle and not by economic drivers. It has to be applied at the right scale – big rather than little.

We are at a critical junction in the management of species at risk in Alberta, especially native fish. Either we act, act quickly and decisively to recover populations, or they will surely slip through our fingers, out of our memory and out of our watersheds. If future generations remember the loss they may well curse us for our carelessness.

Alternatively, we should invest in the future, since that's where all of us will spend the rest of our lives. In that future world I would hope there will be abundant populations of native trout. But, it's hard to see how we are going to get there on the pathway we are currently on.

Because today, as Buffy Sainte-Marie sings: "Little wheels spin and spin, big wheels turn around and around."

Lorne Fitch is a Professional Biologist, a retired Fish and Wildlife Biologist, and an Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary.

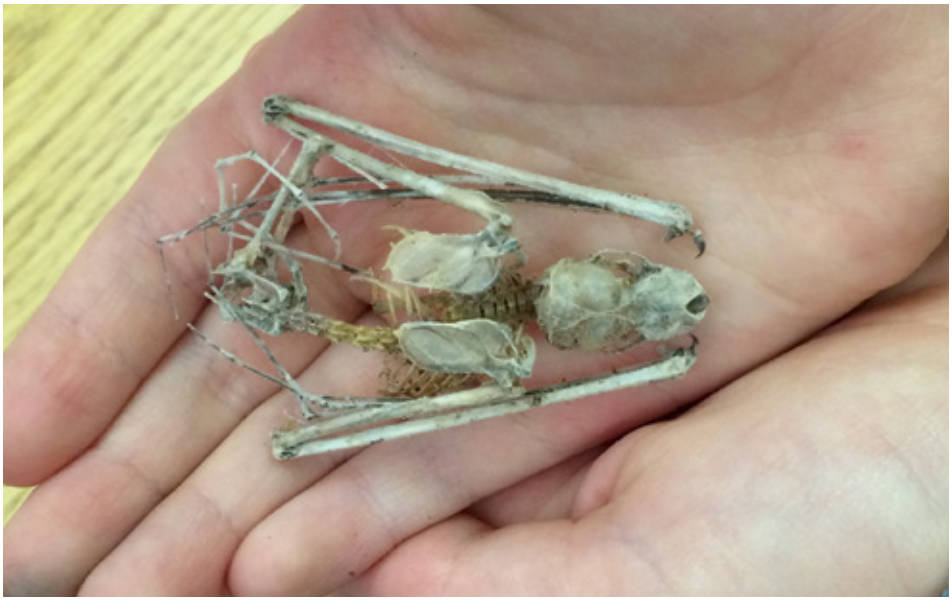
Featured Artist
Wendy Morris

"Silence", Mixed Media, 48" x 24"

Getting Ready to Go to Bat for Bats

By Heather Hadden

On October 29, 2015, the grade one students at FFCA – North West Elementary learned all about a very special mammal, the bat. Through making puppets, decorating cookies, examining an actual little brown bat skeleton, reading books, and watching videos, the students became very knowledgeable about the order *Chiroptera* which means "Hand-Wing." Not only did the students learn that bats are the only mammal that can fly, but also that bats are a very important species to the ecosystem no matter where they live in the world. Bats help to pollinate plants, spread seeds, and, here in Alberta, they help control the insect population. In Canada and the United States, some bat populations are becoming infected with a fungal disease called White Nose Syndrome (WNS). One of the species of bat affected by WNS is the little brown bat, which lives right here in Alberta (see Carolyn Campbell's update on the threat of WNS in Canada in the June 2013 *Wild Lands Advocate*). This disease awakens hibernating bats from their sleep far earlier than they should, with disastrous effects. The students decided to take action and brought donations in to give to the Canadian Wildlife Federation for their research on this deadly disease. Well done Grade Ones!



A very fragile little brown bat skeleton in the gentle hands of a Grade One student. PHOTO: © H. HADDEN

Enthusiastic Grade One students showing off their impressive collection of bat puppets.
PHOTO: © H. HADDEN

Once Upon a Time in the Rockies:

The Enduring Legacy of Too Many Trails

By Sean Nichols, *AWA Conservation Specialist*

The Failure of the Canary Creek Trail

We can generally have faith in this century and this part of the world that a job, when performed by knowledgeable professionals who take due care and attention to said job, will be done correctly. We shouldn't expect failure within a very short time.

We watch with a curious fascination historical scenes such as the video of the 1940 collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, confident that would never happen here, to infrastructure built today.

It runs counter to our faith in technology to think that, if we build things to the best of our ability, they still may fail. A trail along Canary Creek in the Bighorn partially collapsed last winter, less than 10 months after it was constructed. It didn't collapse due to negligence or inability. It collapsed for a very simple reason that construction wizardry cannot always address: steep slopes with soft, waterlogged soils are inherently unstable.

This trail collapse, for this reason, contributes to AWA's consistent opposition over the years to OHV trails in the Bighorn's headwaters. It's why we've consistently opposed such trails in all of Alberta's Rocky Mountains headwaters.

As long time readers of the *Wild Lands Advocate* will be aware, AWA has been taking direct action in the Bighorn for more than 10 years now. We initiated our trail monitoring program on the trails of the Hummingbird area following that 2002 introduction of the Bighorn Access Management Plan, a plan AWA strongly opposed. We termed our program the *Bighorn Wildland Recreational Trail Monitoring Program* and initially intended for it to be a five-year project, running from 2003 through 2008.

The program involves two components: first, we continuously count vehicles using buried TRAFx vehicle counters; second, this count is paired with an annual survey and inventory of damage spots and landscape health along the trails. This design allows AWA to correlate trail use by vehicles with trail conditions. It's not a pretty picture

AWA encountered the collapse along Canary creek this summer during one of our surveying trips. It was the first time we had done a visual survey of this trail, which had been built in the fall of 2014, since our previous trip to Canary Creek. This new trail, built under Alberta Environment and Parks' *Backcountry Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program* (BTFRP), replaced a section with multiple creek crossings and impacts on riparian areas that had been damaged by flooding in 2012.

AWA was encouraged to hear that the trail had been rebuilt. This was especially so since the BTFRP mandates that new trails are built to the Kananaskis trail standard and take long-term sustainability into account. It sounded like an improvement over some of the trail reconstruction efforts OHV groups have undertaken in

Volunteer Ken Lee measures collapsed sections of trail along Canary Creek, less than 10 months after the trail was constructed by the Government of Alberta. PHOTO: © S. NICHOLS

A map of the Hummingbird area trail system showing where AWA undertook monitoring trips during the summer of 2015. AWA recorded 179 notable damage sites (indicated by yellow markers) over about 40km of trail.

the Hummingbird area in previous years. AWA has written of those misadventures before (see the article by Sean Nichols in the October 2013 issue of *Wild Lands Advocate*). They have often involved trails bulldozed through vegetation, no signage, and has been guided by design approaches that did not take hydrology into account. Consequently, some of this reconstruction is even more highly subject to erosion and re-flooding.

With such a low bar to clear, AWA expected that the 2014 BTFRP reconstruction would be an improvement. And to be sure, the bridge over Canary Creek built at the west end of the reconstructed segment is indeed a significant improvement over the unimproved crossings typically found on the trail.

The 800 metres of reconstructed trail leading up to the bridge, however, are a different story. Cut into a 33-degree slope made of soft soil, the trail was already slumping and collapsing not ten months after it was first built.

Why not put the trail somewhere else? There isn't any better place to put the trail. Thrity-three degrees is among the gentlest incline anywhere along that slope; elsewhere it would have been steeper and less stable. The valley bottom is a narrow riparian zone with no real place for a trail to go that does not run through sensitive areas or through the creek and flood plain as the original trail did.

Everything about the situation supports AWA's longstanding contention: these valleys are no place for motorized vehicles or motorized vehicle trails. They cannot support the motorized trail network that has been built there.

Twelve years into the BWRMP, the study's results continue to show, with one of the clearest examples yet, exactly what AWA has long believed and what has been obvious to the many scientists and experts on whose advice we depend. There isn't a good place for trails in this landscape.

Twelve Years of Trail Monitoring

Although this is a particularly clear example, it is far from the only one. Over the many trips taken to the Bighorn by AWA staff and volunteers, we have catalogued, timestamped, and GPS-positioned thousands of photographs and measurements that all support the same conclusion.

We have published photographs of trail erosion, vegetative damage and the effects that these trails have on the landscape (see articles by Sean Nichols in the August 2012, October 2013 and November 2014 issues of *Wild Lands Advocate*).

What is most salient here is this: the presence of the trails themselves causes damage. OHV riders are often quick to insist that a majority of their kin follow the rules and stick to the trails. Only a few "bad apples" misbehave.

This may be so. But even when users follow the rules and even when they stick to the trails damage to the land happens. Even when every single user behaves precisely as they are supposed to, the simple matter of the presence of the trails on the landscape promotes degradation and erosion.

The simple presence of the trail network acts as a vector for increased human presence, increased numbers of hunters, fishers, and potentially poachers. This simple presence changes wildlife movement patterns and fragments habitat. The simple presence of (perfectly rule-abiding) users introduces non-native plant species, vehicle fuel, and other foreign substances to the trail where they take root, soak into the soil, and flow into water courses. These detrimental effects of trail networks in wilderness areas have all been well documented in scientific publications. As with the cause of the collapse of the reconstructed Canary Creek trail, they are not new or unexpected; rather they are routine, obvious, expected.

And to be sure, misbehaving users are a concern as well. Users do go off-trail, do cause havoc in wetlands, and do create illegal "frolic areas."

The trail network is closed to motorized use during the spring, to mitigate damage to the land when it's particularly wet during spring run-offs and to relieve pressure on wildlife during that sensitive time of their life cycles.

From our vehicle counts we can tell that use does, as expected, drop significantly during these times. However, it never drops to zero. Instead we record during closure periods, on average, about ten percent of the daily use we see when the trails are officially open.

It seems reasonable to use this proxy to roughly generalize that somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten percent of users are prepared to ignore posted regulations and ride in a manner that suits them, regardless of the consequences to the environment.

Our "few bad apples" then amount to about ten percent of the barrel. It's ten percent too many.

ESRD reconstruction efforts, such as this re-sited trail along Hummingbird Creek (otherwise relatively well done) are undermined when lack of enforcement means that users ignore signage and continue to use the old trail through riparian zones and badly flooded-out creeks.

Users have been going off trail and creating "frolic areas" on the hills along the back trail between Canary and Hummingbird Creeks PHOTO: © S. NICHOLS

Of course these (ab)users do an amount of damage that far exceeds that of the 90 percent. The effects of a user driving through a wetland or other area with soft soils can last for not just seasons or years but for decades. We see this repeatedly in the Hummingbird trail area with non-designated secondary (i.e.: side) trails. They bear no evidence of recent use but have left deep scars in the ground that are nowhere close to healing.

It's maddening that a simple issue such as signage has been handled so miserably over the years. In many – even most – cases, there is no signage at all. This has been one of our various concerns regarding the often ad-hoc reconstruction performed by user groups; on most cases where a trail has been rerouted, the only indication that a rider should stay off the old trail is a small strip of pink flagging tape. Occasionally there will be branches dragged across the old trail, as if this would seriously discourage its continued use.

Even recently-reconstructed BTFRP trails do not have signage. Surely this must change.

The upshot of trail reconstruction is that users now see two trails before them. They may continue to use the old trail (so far as possible) as well as the new trail. We have essentially doubled the footprint on the landscape for these sections.

Where signs have been erected, there are sometimes those tell-tale signs of a different sort that the bad apples continue to go off-trail.

Enforcement, its absence, is a serious part of this issue. Nothing new there. AEP has made the valid point that they do not have the resources to properly patrol and monitor a large area like the entire Eastern Slopes for violations.

In AWA's view, the takeaway from this is simple: if the resources aren't available to enforce the rules for restricting or managing an activity that badly damages the land, then the activity simply should be prohibited. As the saying goes, OHV use on public land in Alberta is a privilege, not a right. A privileged activity should be allowed only insofar as the resources are in place to properly oversee and manage that activity.

Options

There are definitely options available to address these management issues.

A permit system would be one option: permits could be issued to limit use to numbers and areas that can support that use. Such a system could tie in with enforcement in a couple of ways.

First, misbehaving users lose their permit: abuse it, lose it. It should be as simple as that. For those who preach "educating" riders let this option be lesson number one. Flaunt the rules and you lose your privileges.

Second, permits can be tied to user fees to generate money to fund ministry patrols and other enforcement actions.

Third, by limiting the number of permits government can strive to allow only as many riders on the trails as the land can bear. This limitation would end the free for all that exists when the trail riding season is currently open.

Finally, by putting a price on motorized access to public lands, a permit system might stimulate some entrepreneurship among OHV devotees. Private lands could be purchased or converted into venues where OHVs could frolic.

These options are offered because it's long past time for Albertans to recognize that the historical approach to land use – one where we tend to favour "all uses at most times" cannot hold when our population is growing the way it is. Not only we, but our decision-makers, too, need to recognize this reality. A recent survey by CPAWS found that only about six percent of all Alberta recreationists ride motorized vehicles. It would be a real shame to continue to let them dirty the waters for everyone else.

Perceptions of Predatory Wildlife

By Tempest Emery

Typically, the predator is understood as an animal that kills and eats other animals for food. What does this understanding mean for how we regard and treat these animals? This conventional identification defines the predator solely in relation to its carnivorous tendencies and its ability to inflict harm upon other creatures. This blanket categorization obscures the differences among species of predators and among the individuals comprising their populations. Wolves and cougars, for example, are both classified as predatory beings even though they have vastly different hunting strategies, where wolves hunt in packs and cougars are known for living rather solitary lives. The conventional understanding of the predator also tends to erase the fact that some subsist on an omnivorous diet. This blinkered perspective forms the basis for what Kevin Van Tighem describes in *Predators: Wild Dogs and Cats* as a war against predators. He explains that, through use of such weapons as "strychnine, bullets, snares, traps, and cyanide gas" millions of wolves, coyotes, foxes, cougars, lynx, and bobcats (not to mention bears) have been killed in North America in the last century. The understanding at the root of this approach to predatory wildlife ignores a much more complex reality. With an eye to identifying alternatives to this history of killing, of slaughter, it is worthwhile to explore how we have come to approach these species with such antagonism and violence.

Examining the subtle differences between the use of the word "predator" in relation to humans compared to animals, and parsing the history of the term closely, reveals much about the human perspective on organisms deemed to be predatory and helps to illuminate the ways in which these creatures have been conceptually constructed in the public mind. Interestingly, though today we usually apply the term "predator" to animals, the definitions of predator in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), along with the details of its origin included there, illustrate that this concept has its roots in human-centered, or anthropocentric, perspective activities. The first entry for this term in the *OED* relates to people, defining a predator as "a person who plunders or pillages; a ruthlessly exploitative or rapacious individual; a depredator." Predators violated property rights; predators were greedy thieves. This concept takes on a different meaning when applied to other species, as demonstrated by the second *OED* definition entry which states that a predator is also "an animal that preys on other animals; an animal that eats and kills prey; a carnivore." Though these descriptions are housed under the same term, there is a significant difference regarding what types of actions are regarded as predatory. When used in relation to a person, the predator is defined by stealing or looting, taking that which does not belong to him or her. When this concept is employed in reference to other beings, however, it is to demarcate actions taken in order to get life-sustaining food, a process necessitating the death of other organisms. What remains constant, regardless of the species in question, is that when individuals are classified as predators, it's because their actions are interpreted or read through the human lens.

A review of the origins of the word "predator" also illustrates that this concept is deeply rooted in human perceptions and social relations. The *OED* notes an isolated use of the term by British writer Barnaby Rich, who includes it in his 1581 work, *Don Simonides,* to describe one of his human male characters. The *OED* also indicates that by 1745 the word "predator" came to represent a "person who lives on booty or plunder." It is not until 1908 that it is used in relation to other creatures, with the OED pointing to an article written by C.W. Woodworth titled, "The Theory of the Parasitic Control of Insect Pests," published in the journal *Science* in August of that year. There he describes various insects and parasites as "predators" or "predaceous." According to the *OED*, it wasn't until 1909 before this term came to denote those creatures that prey on other animals. This brief overview of the origins of this term demonstrates that the word "predator" was first used to refer to people who behaved in greedy or voracious ways with respect to property or possessions, long before it was employed to categorize other species with a dietary need for meat. Such a transformation in the way this term is used indicates how we, as humans, perceive other species' carnivorous feeding practices. We might employ the notion of the predator simply as a means of identifying and classifying creatures that consume the flesh of other organisms, but the concept itself is imbued with a sense of avarice and excess which is, in turn, attributed to those beings we characterize. Put another way, if the word "predator" has been used for a long period of time to describe or signify people who pillage or plunder with voracity and greed, when it becomes synonymous for "carnivore" it suggests that the same qualities reside in the human perception of meat-eat-

ing species.

Where human predators are depicted as people who pillage and take what is not theirs, it is interesting to consider the extent to which the connotations of greed and thievery animate our interpretation of nonhuman predators. This line of thought is particularly intriguing given that the mass amount of killing Van Tighem refers to largely responds to the belief that such creatures pose a threat to people on at least two levels: "They hunt the animals we hunt or raise for food, and occasionally, they even kill us." When considered from this angle, the notion of the nonhuman predator reflects our own human anxieties and fears. Managing predatory populations through killing, Van Tighem says, allows us to reinforce our dominance and control over nature and is meant to eliminate our fear. This dynamic perpetuates conflict and violence between the human species and any other species we perceive to be dangerous or capable of seizing what we consider to be ours, be it wild game, livestock, or our own lives. If this often savage and damaging relationship is ever to be transformed, a greater understanding of these "wild hunters" is crucial, as Van Tighem suggests. It will contribute to redeveloping a connection between humans and other members of the natural world in positive and mutually beneficial ways. This is not to say that all people view predatory species as plundering, rapacious, pillagers of property, or that no one is able to see carnivores as anything other than ravenous meat-eating beasts. But, coming to understand the trajectory of some of the conventional concepts we use to understand these animals is useful if we want to shift the course those notions take in the future.

In order to begin the process of re-establishing our relationships with predatory species outside the borders of current, often violent, paradigms, we must first expand our perceptions of them beyond our preoccupation with their capacity to kill and consume other beings. Locating examples illustrating this adjustment in perspective serves as one way to start pushing on some of the conventional boundaries drawn around those beings we identify as predators. Sid Marty's *The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek*, a work of creative non-fiction that examines a series of bear attacks that took place in 1980 in the Whiskey Creek area just outside of the Banff town site in Banff National Park, is such an example. Instead of treating the predators of his story as generic representatives of the natural world, Marty looks closely at the individual experiences of each of his nonhuman "characters" and analyzes the specific circumstances surrounding the events in which they are involved. He investigates a moment in Banff's recent past in which people and bears came into serious conflict with one another. His carefully researched representation of the events of 1980, as well as of the bears held responsible, both illuminates and challenges common understandings of the notion of the predator. At various points Marty writes directly from the perspectives of the two bears associated with the Whiskey Creek incidents. By weaving those imagined voices through a broader account of the events of that summer he demonstrates the role humans play in constructing a creature we deem to be predatory. Marty's unique approach to this problematic moment in our history with our ursine neighbours creates space in which we, too, can question and adjust our own understanding of bears and, by extension, other species we call predators.

Calling attention to some of the roots of our ideas about and approaches to predatory wildlife, as well as considering unique points of view held by people who depart from those established concepts, is one avenue by which we can begin to initiate change in the public perceptions and governmental policies that impact such species.

Tempest Emery recently completed her Master of Arts in English at the University of Calgary. Her work there focused on representations of predators in works of creative nonfiction.

PHOTO: © C. OLSON

AWA on the Road to Alberta's Climate Plan

By Brittany Verbeek, *AWA Conservation Specialist*

"This is the day we step up, at long last, to one of the world's biggest problems — the pollution that is causing climate change." Those were Premier Rachel Notley's words during her speech announcing Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan on November 22nd in Edmonton. The announcement came only shortly before many provincial and federal leaders headed off to Paris for the UN's Climate Change Conference.

AWA participated throughout the consultation process that preceded the release of Alberta's climate change plan. Our climate change submission recommended some of the policies included in the final report. We recommended accelerating the phase out of coal-fired electricity and introducing a broad based carbon price. Our submission also emphasized that AWA believes protecting Alberta's wild spaces is an important part of climate action. Intact forests, wetlands, and grasslands act as significant carbon sinks, as well as facilitating water retention, water purification, and curbing extreme flood and drought events. AWA urged that protecting these ecosystems is an essential component of dealing with greenhouse gas emissions. Current activities which actively degrade these important assets, such as large scale clear cut forestry, should be curbed or eliminated. AWA cautioned that although we fully support Alberta's transition to renewable energies, we believe it can be done without sacrificing prime wilderness areas. The focus should instead be on micro-generation such as residential solar and opportunities for renewables in both urban and rural human-altered environments.

Prior to the Government of Alberta's release of their Climate Plan, AWA also participated in two important events. The first was an evening talk with guest speakers Dr. Joe Vipond from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) and Sierra Club's Bruce Nilles. Bruce is currently the Deputy Conservation Director and was the former director of Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign. He spoke of the campaign's success in stopping 183 coal-fired power plants that were proposed for development in 2000, during the Clinton administration. According to the campaign website, they have now helped retire 206 coal plants across the United States. Coal still provides 39 percent of electricity in the U.S. and was the number one pollutant of freshwater. Bruce told the audience that the Beyond Coal campaign had three phases: 1) Stop the rush to build new coal plants; 2) Create an anti-coal movement; 3) Replace existing plants with clean energy solutions. They successfully completed phase one and now are working on the second and third phases. He said the combination of top down pressure from strong Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules and bottom up pressure from state based coal fights has been very effective for retiring coal-fired plants. For Sierra Club, its key tools in its coal fights have been: public education, protests, and a lot of litigation. During his talk he also provided an excellent example of a jurisdiction that, due to the strong leadership of the state government, developed a coal phase-out initiative that met corporate, worker, and environmental interests. This occurred in Washington state where TransAlta owns and operates a coal-fired electricity plant. The company agreed to transition its plant completely off coal by 2025 and invest $30 million in the community and $25 million in renewable energy technologies through an energy technology transition fund. The only financial concession TransAlta received was the ability to sell coal in Washington under long-term contracts. Taxpayers didn't shell out the hundreds of millions or billions of dollars some have suggested will be needed in Alberta to maintain investor confidence.

Dr. Vipond brought the conversation back to Alberta during his talk, summarizing health and environmental impacts in our province due to coal-fired electricity generation. He told us Alberta has five of the largest single source greenhouse gas emitters in Canada and how Edmonton's air pollution had been exceeding Canadian health standard quality limits. He discussed CAPE's support for an accelerated coal phase out in Alberta and how it could save the province several million dollars in health care costs, not to mention its help in addressing climate change and other environmental impacts.

The second event AWA participated at was Pembina Institute's Climate Strategy Summit on September 9th in Edmonton. There was an air of urgency mixed with optimism in the room full of over two

hundred people representing all different stakeholder groups. The day began with an address by Environment and Parks Minister Shannon Philips making a strong statement that "climate goals need to be achieved and not just set." Chief Allen Adam, representing the *Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation*, also spoke strong words about Treaty 8 being affected by climate change and how he was seeing many changes on the land.

There were excellent panel discussions throughout the day exploring many aspects of Alberta's sources of greenhouse gas emissions and how to reduce them. We heard from investment groups saying that investors have been feeling the social imperative pressures in the last several years and there continues to be a growing appetite for low carbon investments. A representative of the Insurance Bureau of Canada spoke about the increasing cost of more frequent catastrophic weather events likely due to climate change. They wanted to see things like updates to building codes and restrictions on building in flood plains. There were also discussions around what we could learn from other jurisdictions, such as British Columbia's carbon tax – which, as it turns out, looks similar to what Alberta will now implement.

Methane was brought up as a serious and sometimes overlooked contributor to greenhouse gas effects. The US Environmental Protection Agency notes that, over a 100-year period, the impact of each tonne of methane on climate change is 25 times greater than a tonne of carbon dioxide. Addressing methane emission reductions, as well as carbon dioxide reductions, should be part of the conversation. Many conversations and presentations revolved around how best to transition to renewable energies and what were some of the opportunities and challenges facing the renewables sector in Alberta. Finally the day finished off with discussion around energy efficiency and how the obligation to reduce emissions and climate change footprints should not rely solely on big industry players. Everyone should live their lives and act as consumers in ways that contribute positively to the climate change challenge.

Climate change is a complex global issue and AWA applauds the steps taken by the Alberta Government to make some concrete commitments on climate action. As Premier Notley also said during her Climate Leadership speech: "We need to do better. And we are going to do better."

Keephills Generating Station PHOTO: © I. URQUHART

Stewardship at Plateau Mountain

AWA makes a difference

By Chris Saunders, *AWA Board Member*

Many readers will be familiar with Plateau Mountain, a prominent landmark in south western Alberta between the Livingstone Range to the west and the prairie to the east. It is, as the name implies, a genuine plateau about eight kilometres long and one to two kilometres wide. Technically it qualifies as a nunatuk, an area of high land that stood above the ice sheet during the last ice age. Its broad wind-swept summit hosts a remarkable variety of wildflowers and geological features. It provides important grazing for a number of wildlife species, particularly in the winter. To the visitor the plateau can feel like arctic tundra during inclement weather, quite different to the alpine and subalpine to the west. Plateau Mountain was declared an Ecological Reserve in 1991. It is a unique place.

An area is designated an Ecological Reserve because of its rare and fragile landscapes and ecosystems. The primary purpose of the designation is to protect the area for research and education. Access on foot is permitted to the general public for low impact activities such as walking, wildlife viewing, and photography. Activities such as camping, hunting, and the use of off-road vehicles are strictly prohibited.

There has been natural gas exploration and production on Plateau Mountain for many years. The wells and small buildings holding production equipment, now owned by Centrica Energy, are dormant; there has been no production since 2012. The roads that were built to service the wells are gated and are open to only vehicles approved by Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) and Centrica. These roads also serve as the pedestrian access.

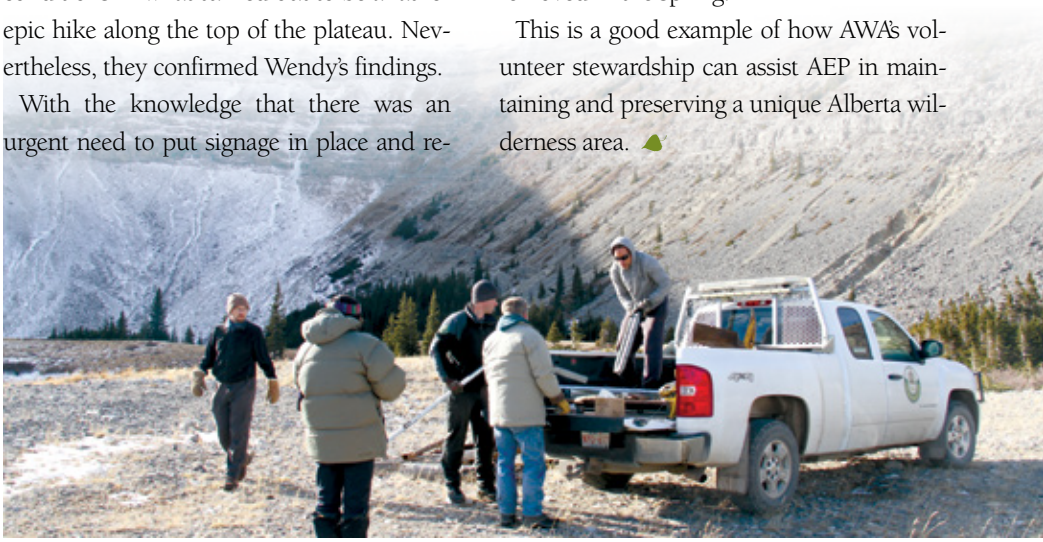
AWA has been a volunteer steward for Plateau Mountain since 2001. This involves visiting the area on a regular basis and working with AEP and Centrica to resolve issues identified during these visits.

In November AWA volunteers made 2 reconnaissance visits to Plateau Mountain. The first was by Wendy Ryan, an experienced environmentalist from the ranching community of Pincher Creek with many years of "on the ground" experience. Wendy's report noted that there were no signs to indicate that Plateau Mountain is an Ecological Reserve even at the points of access. In fact, on her visit she met an individual who was hunting just inside the boundary. When approached he advised he was unaware of the area's Ecological Reserve status. Wendy also noted significant amounts of discarded gas field materials along the road. During the second visit a couple of weeks later Paul Sutherland and Chris and Jennifer Saunders experienced gale force winds with whiteout conditions in what turned out to be a rather epic hike along the top of the plateau. Nevertheless, they confirmed Wendy's findings.

With the knowledge that there was an urgent need to put signage in place and remove a significant amount of waste AWA's executive director, Christyann Olson, swung into action. She organized a volunteer work party consisting of: herself, Dan Olson, Sean Nichols, Wendy Ryan, and David Mitchell, to join Nathan Brown, the AEP representative, on site. At the end of an arduous day's work on November 7, 2015 the group had put 11 signs in place along the road and at other possible access points. The signs clearly state that the area is an Ecological Reserve. In addition, they collected and hauled away about 300 pounds of metal and wood waste. This material, almost certainly left over from the operations of the gas field, had been left as unsightly and potentially dangerous litter in various places across the plateau.

More remains to be done. Signs are required explaining what activities are allowed and not allowed in the reserve, AEP has undertaken to do this in due course, and there are more piles of discarded material along the old road to the north which should be removed in the spring.

This is a good example of how AWA's volunteer stewardship can assist AEP in maintaining and preserving a unique Alberta wilderness area.



Volunteers cleaning up industrial refuse on Plateau Mountain. PHOTO: © C. OLSON

How Many Bucks Does it Take?

By Christyann Olson, *AWA Executive Director*

What an amazing year for conservation. There are some truly significant milestones to write about as we reflect on the past year.

Can you imagine our excitement when we received the spring sage-grouse counts and realized the Emergency Protection Order for greater sage-grouse combined with everyone's efforts on the ground was helping to improve that icon's chances of surviving on Alberta's landscape? To know the numbers of sage-grouse increased raised hope and we have carried on working to see these majestic birds recover and thrive in Alberta. Success for sage-grouse means success for so many other grassland species as well. Our vision is for healthy, vibrant and protected prairies and grasslands with room for wildlife to roam freely amidst the untamed forces of nature.

Late last fall, we learned that the terms for the Hay-Zama Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would be met early. The companies extracting resources from within the boundaries of Hay-Zama Wildland Park are in the clean-up stages – two years earlier than prescribed in the MOU! The process that led to the MOU and the twinning of this area with the Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in China's Inner Mongolia is historic. It is a significant model of cooperation and more importantly collaboration. It is a model that could be applied to similar situations in Alberta and throughout the world.

This fall, the Government of Alberta announced that the 50 year quest AWA and so many others shared for a truly protected Castle Wilderness is one step closer. Industrial scale logging is no longer allowed, and no new tenures for forestry or oil and gas will be given in the expanded Castle Wildland and Castle Provincial Parks. At last, there is progress, and with solid management plans these areas can be restored and truly protected from activities such as OHV use, hunting, and cattle grazing.

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

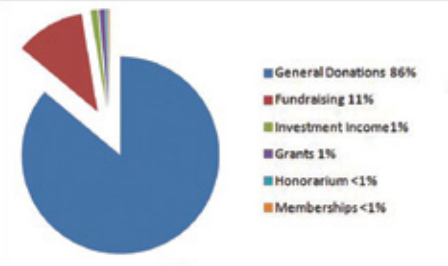
Fifty years as an association is a significant landmark and as the years go by we

will remember this year for the milestones in conservation and for our strength and the support we have from people like you. Your financial support meant we could be tenacious and work throughout Alberta on many issues. It also meant we could purchase our home, the Hillhurst Cottage School. We no longer are at the mercy of a landlord and ownership has made all the difference to our extensive library, our outreach programs, our ability to share meeting space and help our colleagues, our ability to recognize Wilderness Defenders with a permanent wall for their plaques and stories and so much more.

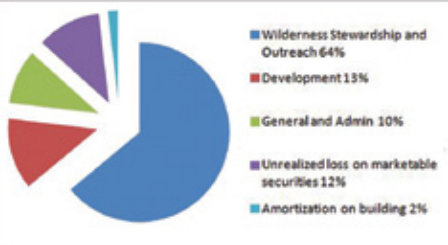
Our financial support comes from you, individual donors and the chart below tells the story of how little AWA depends on foundation grants. We are often recognized for our leanness and ability to operate with the vast majority of our funds being spent on conservation stewardship and outreach – the core of why we exist. The following charts show the source of our revenue and how we spend that money. For more details please see our Annual Report on our website.

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

REVENUE 2014 - 2015



EXPENDITURES 2014 - 2015



Gifts in Memoriam 2014 - 2015

Irene Anderson 1920 – 2014
P.K. Anderson 1927 – 2014
Ivy Brierley 1925 – 2015
Gail Buck 1950 – 2014
Jim Clampett 1933 -2014
Steve Dixon 1917 – 2014
Arlene Fearon 1939 – 2015
Wade Foster
Helen Giles 1918 – 2014
Ray Graham
Bill Hall 1938 – 2015
Christina Havard 1944 – 2015
Benjamin Karasek 1924 – 2014
Charles Lacy
David Manzer
Murray Manzer
Weslyn Mather 1945 -2015
Stewart McCrae 1929 -2015
Phyllis McDonald 1918 – 2015
Marilyn McKinley
Mary McPherson 1936 – 2015
Charles Miller 1921 – 2009
Elsie Mole 1936 – 2014
Delha Ng 1955 – 2015
Kim Schoff 1959 – 2015
Barry Simpkins 1937 – 2014
Teri Lee Tapay 1958 – 2014
Sharon Tranter 1940 – 2013
Kay Wallis 1929 – 2015
Robin White 1939 -2014

Celebration Donations

Raymond William Hadden's Christening
Gerry Annand's Birthday
Gus Yaki's Botany Outings
Carol Tracey
Alex and Lindsay
Dave and Liane Hockey
Winifried Gregor
Betty Blessman
Philip and Tristann Stopford
Benjamin Wyatt Urquhart Vonesch's First Birthday

AWA's 2015 Kids' Camp

By Brittany Verbeek, *AWA Conservation Specialist*

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

Field trips to Nose Hill Park and Big Hill Springs Provincial Park allowed the kids to experience firsthand the complexities and beauty of natural landscapes and to share these experiences with their peers. They helped spot, and learnt the names and fun facts about, creeping white and golden aster, gumweed, Swainson's hawks, Savannah sparrows, trembling aspen, and many more. They learnt the difference between native and non-native species and how humans have impacted native prairies. The kids essentially became 'grassland groupies' by building bee hotels, identifying plants and animals on our nature walks, playing wildlife habitat games, and catching and examining aquatic insects and amphibians. Gus Yaki, naturalist extraordinaire, and Dave Mayhood, aquatic specialist, enhanced our campers' knowledge through their expert knowledge of interactions between plant and animal species inhabiting many grassland habitats.

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

A big thanks to all the wonderful kids who participated in the two weeks of camp; to the parents and families for their wonderful support; and to our incredible volunteers. They included Marcus Mabee, Joanna Kocot, and Joanna Skrajny who helped run the camp and special guests Gus Yaki, Bonnie Curran, Barry Marks, Dave Mayhood and Nuno Fragoso. Like our grasslands you are so very special!

An Ode to Those Hostelling Years

By Chris Havard

Eisenhower Junction, Mosquito Creek, Ramparts Creek, Alexander River Crossing, Hilda Creek, Ribbon Creek…

For Vivian and I, two young women from the northern prairie area of Fort St John – these names represented magical spots – doorways to futures of exploration at many levels, to our fascination with the outdoors, to our desire to protect these wilderness spaces.

These were the names of Youth Hostels maintained by the Youth Hostelling Association, most of which had been log cabins built by the CPR.

In the case of Ribbon Creek, we actually helped to construct the old A-frame building that stood where the fancy Kananaskis Hotel now stands. That place held many memories of birthday parties, song fests and, not least, of the time a packrat built a stinking nest in Ray Sloan's hat, left on a bunk.

In 1962, during frosh week at the University of Alberta at Calgary, we discovered the presence of a hosteling group in Calgary. This was first on our "to do" list and we made our way to what I now know was the Hillhurst Cottage School. Meetings of the hosteling association were on Wednesday nights and they came complete with slide shows of hiking and skiing in the Rockies, advice, friendship, and a list of trips available to take on the weekends.

Despite our limited finances, dreadful equipment, and scrambles for shared transportation, we got out there to places like Mount Assiniboine, Pinto Lake, Floe Lake, Helmut Falls, Plain of the Six Glaciers, Black Rock Mountain, Lake O'Hara, Sentinel Pass and Paradise Valley, and many places in Kananaskis country.

One of our first hikes was out of Ribbon Creek Hostel, starting with a hike up Ribbon Creek then climbing the cliffs up the chains to Ribbon Lake. Back at the hostel, I was so grateful for the hostel cot to rest my aching body on. The cliff climb was up a high vegetation covered cliff. Those chains seemed unreliable to me - were we reckless? It certainly counted as adventure and quite a large group of us made it up and down.

We spent one terrifying day learning to climb vertical faces, do 3-point contact maneuvers, and to rappel off swinging ropes. All of this was under the tutelage of Eddie Green, aka the human fly. These techniques, valuable as they were to me later, were largely forgotten during the sleepless night that followed. I was kept awake for what seemed like most of the night - anticipating the climb of the Wedge we were to do the next day. I was very relieved to awaken to pouring rain.

Our first time on skis was at Hilda Creek Hostel. Guided by our more mountain-savvy peers, we climbed with touring skis part way up Parker Ridge through thigh deep snow. For us beginners, our descent consisted of sliding cross hill at a shallow angle, falling over to stop, getting up to make a kick turn so we could proceed downslope in the other direction. Soon we were taught to make snowplow turns, we were exhilarated, and hooked!

We learned to ski mountaineer on seal skis with clamp-down marker bindings. The University branch of the CYA and other regular hostel members climbed and slid down mountains all up and down the Banff-Jasper Parkway using the techniques we learned from older Hostel Members.

I recently spoke to Val Scholefield, the social coordinator at some time in the 1960s. She described the after meeting get-togethers at Phil's Pancake House where strawberry pancakes were considered the choicest splurge. Craig Sky also reminded me that the Calgary Mountain Club also met at the Cottage School -- but their after-meeting venue was a local beer parlour. Actually, Vivian and I weren't old enough to go to the bar yet as the legal age in Alberta was 21, so that was that. This could be part of the reason I never became a mountain climber.

I remember the great feasts of Chinese food at Dennis Chen's uncle's restaurant. Once 21, I also remember the after-hostel meeting forays to the Highlander Hotel where beer was10 cents a glass. I once came home from one such foray with what I thought was Connie Crowley's climbing rope - I thought she had left it in the pub. I later discovered it was the rope the pub used to cordon off sections. I sheepishly returned it.

Back to the field… these trips could be grueling due to a variety of factors: trip leaders with long long legs, horseflies, mosquitoes, really bad weather including snow, hopeless polyethylene shelters (particularly if it rained or snowed), poor sleeping bags, and few tents.

We were exposed to any number of culinary delights during our hostelling days: such as the delights of chili made in the field, tang, gorp. I suspect we drank water from the land as giardia hadn't made it to the Rockies yet…at least that's what we thought.

Through these trips we learned how to cross creeks and rivers without bridges, we fished, we learned to recognize birds, flow-

Vivian Pharis and Chris Havard PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

ers, mushrooms. We even learned the lyrics to popular folk songs. Whatever we knew, we shared. We learned to be independent and to depend on others.

Hillhurst Cottage School gave us the chance to form lasting friendships with like-minded friends. My list included Ray Sloan, George Holton, Lois Yelland, Dennis Chen, Jack Dunphy, Gary Fabris and Anne Slater.

Others are remembered for their later careers, people such as harpist Joanne Hoare and ski resort entrepreneur Charlie Locke. Also, Marion Tattersall, Don Elliot, Joan Dunkley, Don Wales, Dennis Leask, Eddie Green, photographer Ron Hoff, Earl Smith and many more.

After Hillhurst Cottage School was retired, it became a support for nature lovers throughout Alberta.

When AWA took over the building's lease, remnants of the hostelling days remained behind, including a box of hard old woolen blankets, some of which live on as perfect pads for Vivian's pack horses.

Other groups that used this facility in the 1970s and into the 1990s included the Great Divide Trail Association and the Bow Waters Canoe Club. I still remember the smell of fiberglass resin from the canoe repairs and building that went on in the basement, and the headaches those fumes produced. CPAWS, Calgary Mountain Club, Friends of Kananaskis Country, Green Party of Alberta, Greening Calgary…all used this wonderful building.

Also, I recall the clogging club that loved our wooden floors and would have rented our facility forever except we couldn't take their din. Folk singer James Keelaghan worked for AWA for 2 summers while taking a degree in history from U or C and his band practiced here in the building. That was definately more soothing than the cloggers.

Once AWA assumed the lease from the City of Calgary, we became responsible for the building's maintenance. Through two Canada Manpower grants in the early 1980s we stripped the walls out of both upper floors, installing insulation in the ceiling and walls, replacing old lathe and plaster and burlap insulation. The upper floor was rewired and a new furnace installed. We worked for provincial historical status and now have municipal historic status as well. We have reshingled the roof, installed new eavestroughing, painted inside and out, repaired the leaking foundation, and so on to keep this building in excellent condition. All this while maintaining the historical feature of this old cottage school, dating back to 1910.

As a final comment, I am just so grateful to have had these experiences - they made my life. Thank you to all my friends in those early years and to AWA for all you are doing.

Chris wrote this in June and presented it at AWA's 50th Anniversary celebration with help from Vivian Pharis. Early this fall Chris succumbed to cancer and for those who saw her at her happiest and best in June the news was unbelievable. She was a supporter and gave freely of her spirit and her financial wealth.

Featured Artist
Wendy Morris

"Prairie Dusk" , Mixed Media, 48" x 24"

Updates

A Swim Forward for Cutthroats

On December 2, 2015, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada announced that a Critical Habitat Order had been issued for the westslope cutthroat trout, Alberta populations. The Order, immediately coming into force, triggers the prohibition under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) of the destruction of any part of the trout's critical habitat.

SARA requires the Minister to issue a critical habitat order within 180 days after the final recovery strategy is published on SARA's Public Registry. The recovery strategy for the westslope cutthroat trout was issued on March 28, 2014, therefore, the 180-day statutory deadline expired long, long ago – on September 24, 2014. Because the federal government missed this legal deadline so badly, AWA teamed up with Timberwolf Wilderness Society, Shaun Fluker and his team of students with the University of Calgary's Faculty of Law to file an application in Federal Court to force the Minister to issue the Order. This legal avenue was the last straw. We had repeatedly and unsuccessfully requested the Conservative Minister to issue the overdue Order called for by the law. The registration of the Order by the Minister means we no longer need to continue with our litigation.

Theoretically and hopefully, this Order should make it more difficult for industrial or recreational activities to occur within or adjacent to streams listed as critical habitat in the westslope cutthroat trout federal recovery strategy. It provides legal protection to cutthroat critical habitat. If human activities destroy critical habitat the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) can prosecute. This should ultimately enhance the protection of this threatened native fish and facilitate their recovery in their native waters.

- Brittany Verbeek

Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan

The Government of Alberta announced its Climate Leadership Plan on November 22, 2015. For Alberta it is a sweeping plan. Its highlights include a phase-out of coal fired electricity by 2030 coupled with a transition to 30 percent renewable electricity generation, an overall cap – increased from today's levels to 100 million tonnes for the oil sands, an economy-wide price on carbon, and a strategy to reduce methane emissions by 45 percent by 2025.

The Government of Alberta convened a climate change advisory panel in the summer of 2015, its mandate was to review Alberta's climate change policies and to provide advice on a new set of policy measures which will reduce Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions. This panel saw more than 1,000 people attend public open houses, coupled with over 25,000 responses received through their online survey. Feedback was also received from multiple stakeholders, including Aboriginal Peoples, industry, and environmental organizations such as AWA. All of this fed into the panel's report and formed the basis of the Climate Leadership Plan.

AWA applauds the Alberta Government for this plan, as it acknowledges that Alberta should play a constructive role on the global stage with regard to climate change. Climate change has serious impacts on biodiversity and wildlife; it threatens our future water security. In Alberta, climate change very likely means more intense flood/drought events. It most certainly contributes to reduced river flow, increased glacial melt, and a reduction in water quality. A price on carbon that impacts everyone will ensure that we all will share the responsibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Alberta, the source for 36.8 percent of Canada's emissions, is Canada's greenhouse gas emissions leader. At AWA we hope this plan is the first step towards delivering the far-reaching impacts needed to help reduce our national and international emissions. A healthy future depends on keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius.

Joanna Skrajny

Red Deer River Watershed Alliance's Fall Forum

This November, AWA was asked to speak at the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance's (RDRWA) Fall Forum. This has been a big year for the RDRWA. With the completion of a Background Technical Report on Terrestrial and Aquatic Biodiversity, development of a first draft of the Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) and the initiation of Project Blue Thumb, this Watershed Council has been keeping very busy. Project Blue Thumb is an especially promising initiative – it is a social innovation lab that brings together a diverse group of stakeholders to build relationships and prototype solutions to a range of quality issues. In October, AWA helped provide feedback on the first draft of the IWMP.

The Fall Forum day was filled with a number of interesting speakers, beginning with Alberta Tomorrow. They described the changes to the landscape that have occurred in the Red Deer River Watershed over the course of time. Like many Alberta watersheds, much of the RDR watershed has been converted into agricultural land. This, coupled with exponential population growth and extensive energy footprints, has created multiple pressures on the land. They suggest that modelling the landscape can help inform future land use decisions and encourage best practices by visualizing the future outcomes of those decisions. Alberta Tomorrow is a non-profit group that has been advocating this message since 2005, when it first made its ALCES model-based educational tool freely available on its website platform. One can only hope that decision makers and land owners will heed this non-profit's advice.

Next up was Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency (AEMERA). It presented "Building the Picture (in the Red Deer Watershed) Today for the Future." Established in 2014, AEMERA is now responsible for monitoring water quality which previously had been handled by Alberta Environment & Parks (AEP). During the transition, AEP passed on large amounts of water quality data which they have accumulated over many years. AEMERA is now working on reporting and making this information publicly available. Perhaps these more accessible data records will help to shed light on what impacts land use changes have had on our water and encourage better stewardship and responsible water management in the future.

The rest of the day consisted of a panel discussion on the changing role of agriculture in the Red Deer River watershed, followed by presentations from Western Canada Spill Service and the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC). AIWC's presentation was eye opening for outlining the costs (money, time, love, and care) of saving and rehabilitating wildlife harmed by an oil spill. To wrap up the day, AWA gave a presentation on connectivity and biodiversity as well as the role everyone can play in improving biodiversity within the watershed.

Overall, it was a very interesting, informative day. It was very encouraging to see how many passionate people live within the watershed and are actively engaged with water issues. The year we are about to say goodbye to marks the 10-year anniversary of the RDRWA – AWA looks forward to what the next 10 years will bring and hopes that the commitment to improving water quality within the watershed will only grow stronger with time.

- Joanna Skrajny

Obed Spill Charges

Finally, the Alberta Energy Regulator laid six charges following the spill from a wastewater containment pond at the Obed Mountain Coal Mine on October 31, 2013. These charges were laid only days before the two year time limit for laying charges expired. The mine site is located approximately 30 kilometres east of Hinton and the spill caused 670 million litres of coal slurry to surge into two tributary creeks that eventually flow into the Athabasca River. Two hundred and sixty-eight – that's how many Olympic-size swimming pools of slurry spilled.

At the time of the spill, Coal Valley Resources (CVRI), a subsidiary of Sherritt International Corporation, operated the mine. The charges are for contraventions of the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act (EPEA), the Public Lands Act (PLA)*, and the *Water Act*. The first court appearance is scheduled for January 20, 2016, in Hinton Provincial Court.

Several individuals and groups, including AWA, have worked tirelessly since the spill occurred to keep the issue in the media and keep pressure on both provincial and federal regulators to press charges. We called on the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) and the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to hold themselves accountable for ensuring safe and healthy watersheds. We urged that charges and, if convicted, stiff fines were necessary to send a message to companies that accidents of this magnitude are unacceptable.

Details relating to the cause of the spill still haven't been made public, despite many of our letters requesting this information. DFO still hasn't laid charges under the *Fisheries Act*. We will continue to press the federal government to join the AER and press charges against the company.

- Brittany Verbeek

Featured Artist Wendy Morris

"At a Glacial Rate", Mixed Media, 36" x 24"

"Serenity", Oil.

Winter Events

Wilderness Around the World 2015/16 Edmonton Speaker Series

INDIA: Mountains and Tigers
With David Hobson
Wednesday, December 9, 2015

MOUNT ST. HELENS: The Power of Nature
With Dr. Evelyn Merrill
Wednesday, January 13, 2016

BRAZIL: Wilds of the Pantanal
With Dr. Jim Butler
Wednesday, February 17, 2016

ZAMBIA/ZIMBABWE/TANZANIA : Off the Beaten Track African Parks
With Bill Reynolds
Wednesday, March 16, 2016

Location: Jackson Power Electric Ltd.
(9744 - 60 Avenue, Edmonton)
Time: Doors open 6:30pm Talks start 7:00pm
Cost: FREE! Donation at the Door Appreciated
To pre-register and guarantee a seat:
www.gowildalberta.ca/shop/talks or call 1-866-313-0713

Music for the Wild

Headline Act

Fifty Shades of Blues. Glennis Houston & Andrea Petrity sing and play blues from the women divas of the 1920s and 30s. Let them transport you back to the sultry clubs of New Orleans, Chicago, St. Louis ,and New York when powerful women laid down the foundation of blues, jazz and rock. Fifty Shades of Blues is a piano/vocal duo..

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.

Date: Saturday, February 6, 2016
Time: Music at 7:30pm, doorsopen 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/music-for-the-wild

Music for the Wild

Headline Act

Nathan M. Godfrey. Accompanying himself on resonator guitar, mandolin and banjo, Nathan M. Godfrey plays old-time music of the Americas, from the cowboy songs of Alberta's coulees to the vintage tangos of bustling Buenos Aires. His passion for music has been shaped by his experiences herding sheep in northern BC, working on his father's farm near Olds, Alberta, and his travels throughout North America and the Southern Cone.

Opening Act

The Still Waters. A love of singing and song has brought Dianne Quinton and Peter May into musical partnership. Equally comfortable playing in small intimate settings or large venues, they connect with audiences through a combination of powerful songs rooted in folk, country and blues infused with close soulful harmonies and evocative instrumentals.

Date: Saturday, March 19, 2016
Time: 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/music-for-the-wild

For a complete list of AWA hikes and tours go to: gowildalberta.ca/product-category/hikes-tours/

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