

Public/Private Lands/Interests

Our time is one where much effort is made to distinguish between the public and private spheres of our lives, between when the “public good or interest” should trump private interests and ambitions or where private interests should prevail. At the same time much effort is made to blur the boundaries between these spheres and the priorities they privilege. Public-private partnerships, for example, try to blur distinctions. They suggest that these partnerships, seen quite frequently in the context of building schools or public transportation, can further both public and private interests.

The features in this issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate* speak to this general issue and do so in the context of the land. How are public lands managed? Are they managed in ways ensuring that private desires and wants don't diminish their capacity to perform important functions for the general public? Gordon MacMahon and Robert Sandford look at clearcut logging practices in the Ghost River watershed through this lens. Clearly this technique is one designed to satisfy private

wants and needs, such as those of Spray Lakes Sawmills and its employees. But does government, the steward of the Crown lands which loggers depend on, ensure that the public interests served by forests in watersheds – ecological services and biodiversity – receive their due?

Industrialization of public lands may be the most obvious case where we can examine what sort of balance exists between private and public. Recreation on public lands also is an important element of this issue. Adam Driedzic invites you, and government, to consider how other jurisdictions regulate recreational activities such as off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. Can we learn from other jurisdictions and manage recreational activities better in Alberta? Adam thinks so.

The impact of OHV use on Crown lands also is the focus of Sean Nichols' article on the Bighorn. AWA's long-term trail monitoring program in the Bighorn is one of our organization's activities I'm proudest of. Sean's report, one in an ongoing annual series, offers vital knowledge about motorized recreational activity on public lands and its consequences.

What about our cities? Most of us, after all, spend most of our lives in urban environments. What, if anything, is being done in our largest cities to ensure that public spaces there are preserved in the name of public goods such as biodiversity? David Robinson explores that question in this issue of the *Advocate*.

To turn the issue upside down, what about the relationship between private lands, and the activities on those lands, and the public interest? How can private activities protect and promote public interests and values? Conservation easements offer one mechanism to do just this. I look at a particularly contentious case where conservationists fought with each other over the terms and implementation of a conservation easement. It's a cautionary tale.

Many of the other contributions to this issue of your magazine also touch on this important issue. We hope you find them useful in thinking about this crucial relationship between the private and the public in Alberta.

-Ian Urquhart, Editor

