



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

March 10, 2015

Honourable Kyle Fawcett
Minister of Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD)
Edmonton, AB T2E 2T9
esrd.minister@gov.ab.ca

RE: Two upcoming OHV events planned in Ghost/Waiparous and Castle areas

Dear Minister Fawcett,

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) wrote to you on September 29, 2014 with our concerns regarding off-highway vehicle (OHV) events in the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills regions. We appreciated your response and the time your staff took out of their day to meet with us regarding this important issue. They provided us with many answers to our questions. However, some of the answers were disturbing because of perceived policy constraints and evident lack of resources allocated to properly manage and enforce these off-road motorized events on public land.

AWA is now pre-emptively alerting you and your staff to two upcoming planned events, one in the Ghost/Waiparous area and the other in the Castle. These two events must be stopped to prevent further destruction of these crucial headwater areas. Permitting these high impact events to take place will cause physical damage to the watershed. It will also encourage the mentality that a small minority of motorized recreationalists can do whatever destructive actions they please on public land without regard for other recreationalists and ecological values of the area.

Information Gathered about Planned Events

Ghost/Waiparous Event¹:

The organizers for this planned event seem to be two groups, Unleashed Events and Impact Indoor Racing. The location proposed is on the Lost Knife designated OHV trail in the Ghost Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ). The event is planned to run from May 16 to May 18, 2015. The following statement was taken directly from the promotional material for this event. "There are water crossings on the trail! Be sure your rig has the proper setup such as snorkel or you have proper water clearance. Most of the water isn't deep but there is one spot that if your on stock tires you'd have problems." [Typos in original] This statement clearly demonstrates the race organizers are not going to enforce the use of bridges that are in place along the designated trail or install temporary water crossings. They seem to be doing the

¹ Information obtained for Ghost/Waiparous event from: <https://www.facebook.com/events/303886266483636>

exact opposite, promoting illegal behaviour by participants to drive right through streams and other wet areas.

Castle Event²:

The organizers for this planned event seem to be two groups, Unleashed Events and Unleashed Offroad. The location is within the Castle Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ). The event is planned to run from July 3 to July 5, 2015. Statements provided in the promotional material such as “HAVE FUN AND LETS RIP SHIT UP ;)” strongly imply that the event organizers are encouraging participants in illegal behaviour to damage public lands and waters. Another statement that concerns AWA greatly is: “The terrain is very widespread, the park is huge! and you can literally get lost ! Please mark your trails and turns to avoid getting lost.” This suggests they will be promoting illegal off-designated OHV trail use during the event, increasing their footprint and the potential severity of damage.

Both the Castle and the Ghost/Waiparous areas have been iconic destinations for many Albertans to enjoy the natural environment and find tranquility. AWA is very concerned the increased frequency and intensity of OHV activity is compromising these and many other values. From discussions with your departmental staff, it is obvious AWA’s concerns align with your ministry. We request that policy and resource decisions be made to prevent further harmful impacts of these events.

As AWA understands it, to date ESRD has not rejected a proposal for an organized event or set a limit on how many permit applications can be granted per year to hold OHV events. Permits should be denied to any event, such as these two, that seem likely to result in off-trail, wetland and watercourse damage. In addition, the timing restrictions in place should expand from winter months, to other important times of year, such as spring and fall fish spawning periods, especially since Alberta has two threatened native trout species needing full habitat protection to successfully recover populations.

AWA requests that both an administrative fee to help fund enforcement officer presence, and a damage fund, be required for OHV events. At present, damage costs resulting from events like these are borne by Alberta tax payers while event organizers are profiting by charging a participation fee with no motivation to follow rules, clean up, or prevent destruction of wildlife habitat. The ongoing investigation of an OHV event near Racehorse Creek last summer should further highlight the need for these events to pay into a damage fund. An on-the-ground enforcement officer presence during these events is also necessary to deter further damage to these sensitive areas.

AWA is aware of the current implementation of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) and the sub-regional planning including the Recreation Management Plans. The SSRP clearly states the following in regards to OHV use (SSRP, Appendix K, pg 158):

“Public Land Use Zone

*Off-highway vehicle use is **not permitted except where specified by signs/notices posted (i.e. designated trails)**. There may be restrictions around size/type of conveyance as well as timing of use. Generally, **crossing naturally occurring bodies of water or naturally occurring watercourses can only occur at bridges or designated crossings.***

Conservation Areas and Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas

² Information obtained for Castle event from: <https://www.facebook.com/events/878204652231775>

Where it is permitted use, off-highway vehicle use will be managed to designated off-highway vehicle trails and areas. Off-highway vehicle use is **permitted only on existing off-highway vehicle trails and areas where a management plan, trails plan, regulation, sign, notice or trail marker designates such use.**

No new trails or routes or access may be developed without a management plan, trail plan, or regulation. Off-highway vehicle use shall not occur in the beds and shores of permanent water bodies. (Emphasis added)

These statements are strong and clearly outline the direction the Alberta government would like to take with regards to motorized recreation in conservation areas and public land use zones. Yet without the ability to reject permit proposals and proper on-the ground enforcement, these guiding policy statements have little merit.

AWA believes the off-highway vehicle communities need to understand that they can no longer host destructive events on public land such as the ones planned in the Castle and Ghost/Waiparous. They are blatantly degrading headwaters ecological values and the recreational experiences of responsible users.

AWA urges you to put a stop to these two events while you move forward with the SSRP implementation, including important missing pieces such as the Linear Footprint Management Plan, the Biodiversity Management Framework, and the Recreation Management Plans. We look forward to your consideration of this matter and prompt action to prevent these events.

Sincerely,

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



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