

Conservation Easement on Three Sisters Corridor: A Valuable Legacy

By Heather MacFadyen, PhD



Alberta and Three Sisters Mountain Resort (TSMV) have signed a conservation easement agreement on the Stewart Creek section of the Three Sisters Primary Along Valley Wildlife corridor and a portion of the Stewart Creek Across Valley Corridor. This ends a 10-year hiatus since 2005 when this agreement went into limbo, after being agreed to by TSMV, the Province, and the Town of Canmore.

The Three Sisters Wildlife Corridor is a legal requirement of the 1992 Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) approval for Three Sisters Golf Resorts Inc. to develop in Canmore's Bow Valley after their application to build a resort in the Wind Valley was denied.

Until now there have been two conservation easements in place on the Three Sisters Primary Corridor in the Three Sisters Resort Area, with one easement on the core Along Valley Corridor and the Across Valley Corridor and corridor buffers (2003), and another on the 35-metre corridor buffer to the Along Valley Corridor to “*widen the effective width of the wildlife corridor*” (2007).

The addition of this third conservation easement in the Stewart Creek Area is a long awaited conservation legacy. It marks a significant positive step toward protecting the entire Three Sisters Primary Along Valley Wildlife Corridor on the basis of the “*more recent scientific thought*” expected by the NRCB.

Mayor John Borrowman and Canmore Town Council, and Alberta Environmental and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD) are to be congratulated for responding to public concern and finalizing this conservation easement.

The Stewart Creek section of the Along Valley Wildlife Corridor

The ‘Stewart Creek’ Corridor section comprises approximately 2.3 kilometres of the Three Sisters Primary Multi-Species Along Valley Wildlife Corridor.

To the northwest lies the Resort Area section of the Along Valley Corridor and to the southeast is the corridor “disconnect” with the Wind Valley section of the Primary Corridor still proposed for protection by AESRD.

Unfortunately the Municipal District of Bighorn approved the Stewart Creek Golf Course in 1991 just before the proclamation of the NRCB and its 1992 Decision on Three Sisters Resorts. This approval came despite the fact almost two-thirds of the golf course is comprised of wildlife corridors.

Over the years, with increasing pressure for development adjacent to the wildlife corridor, as well as for year-round recreation in the golf course and corridor, it became imperative to provide permanent protection of this primary wildlife corridor. It connects Wind Valley to the Bow and Spray Valleys and Banff National Park so that it remains fully functional for wildlife movement in the late fall, winter, and early spring.



Looking eastward to Stewart Creek and Wind Valley wildlife corridor sections. PHOTO: © H. MACFADYEN

The Stewart Creek Conservation Easement Agreement

The Stewart Creek Conservation Easement protects a total area of 95.94 hectares of land. Over 60 percent of the land is comprised of wildlife corridors, with approximately 58 percent lying in the Along Valley Wildlife Corridor and approximately two percent lying in the Stewart Creek Across Valley Wildlife Corridor.

About one-third of the CE (32.9 hectares) is made up of Crown/public lands that until now have been leased to the golf course. They lie almost entirely in the Along Valley Wildlife Corridor. TSMV will receive title to these lands in exchange for permanent protecting the corridors and adjacent lands within the easement.

The remaining two-thirds of the CE (63 hectares) are owned by TSMV. In this area

over 44 percent of the golf course lies in either the Across or Along Valley Wildlife Corridor.

According to Kyle Fawcett, former Minister of ESRD, *“the easement restricts development and activity to (existing) golf-related activities – no other development or recreational activity will be permitted”*.

Final protection of the Three Sisters Corridor

In addition to championing the 2003 and 2007 conservation easements in the TSMV Resort Area, the Bow Corridor Organization for Responsible Development (BowCORD) has worked, from 2004 to 2015, for the permanent protection of the Stewart Creek section of the Along Valley Corridor under a Provincial Conservation Easement Agreement, with support from AWA and others.

We hope signing this 2015 CE in the Stewart Creek area will herald a final agreement with the Province, where TSMV meets their legal obligations under the NRCB ruling to protect the remaining south east section of the Three Sisters Along Valley Wildlife Corridor in the Smith Creek Area with functional corridors that are consistent with ESRD recommendations. This will ensure the safe movement and survival of wildlife through the Bow Valley and connecting regions of Kananaskis Country, the Wind and Spray Valleys, and Banff National Park. 🌲

Heather MacFadyen is the Chair of the Bow Corridor Organization for Responsible Development and a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal for conservation of wildlife corridors and habitat in Alberta.