

the offender claim “this is how we wash our quads” as he spun the tires along the river bottom. This kind of reporting clearly indicates that Albertans are getting increasingly fed up with the destruction of their headwaters.

At the same time, AWA doesn't believe our landscapes should have to rely on exceptional individuals (see my article “From Hummingbird to Hope” in this February's issue of WLA). Going after irresponsible OHV users should be part of the government's organizational culture, a routine part of the job.

So AWA again encouraged the provincial government and the RCMP to step up enforcement of environmental regulations on public lands. We supported the proposal to create an RCMP division tasked with that enforcement. The support from the judiciary, from the public and the individual RCMP officers was clearly in place – the government needed to be on board as well.

That support arrived shortly afterwards. In a second development, the Government of Alberta announced the establishment of 23 new environmental enforcement positions to patrol Alberta's Eastern Slopes and other backcountry areas.

The 23 new positions are being drawn from a combination of conservation officers and seasonal park rangers. Twenty-one of the officers will patrol the Eastern Slopes, operating out of offices in Pincher Creek, the Elbow River, and Rocky Mountain House. The remaining two enforcement officers will operate out of Fort McMurray. All of these new

enforcement officers are anticipated to work in coordination with the RCMP and with Alberta Justice and Solicitor General.

The positions are being created as a pilot program that will run throughout the summer; at the end of the season they will be evaluated to determine whether or not to continue the program on a permanent basis.

Findings from AWA's 11-year ongoing recreational trail monitoring project in the Bighorn indicate that Alberta's growing population and affluence have resulted in ever-increasing numbers of OHV users in the backcountry areas of the Eastern Slopes. In addition to the users, such as those charged in March, that knowingly and willingly perform activities that damage riverbanks and threatened fish habitat, many of the new OHV users also exhibit a simple lack of awareness. We hope education can prevent damage done through ignorance, while strong penalties such as steep fines and vehicle confiscations are applied to users who deliberately abuse the landscape. As with every year since AWA began monitoring in 2004, the data collected in 2014 offered ample evidence of some OHV users riding during clearly-posted closure period, and off of designated trails.

Wider public awareness of harmful impacts, steep penalties for irresponsible OHV, and enforcement are needed to combat the environmental damage OHVs may cause. AWA strongly applauds the government for establishing this project and hopes to see it continued past the end of the summer.

Positive Developments in the Fight Against OHV Offenders

Life got a little bit riskier for off-highway vehicle (OHV) offenders along Alberta's Eastern Slopes this spring after a couple of developments on the enforcement front.

In a March ruling, a judge in Rocky Mountain House assessed two \$1,500 fines against OHV users joyriding in the Clearwater River. This is the highest fine ever levied for this charge in Alberta's history. As reported in Rocky Mountain House's *The Mountaineer* newspaper, the judge in the case expressed disappointment at “the lack of respect the OHV users in [Rocky Mountain House] have for the local environment and wildlife.” It was encouraging to see the decision offer judicial recognition to the value of Alberta's headwaters regions and the damage irresponsible OHV use may cause. A tip of the hat as well should go to local RCMP officers for their diligence in recording and bringing charges against the joyriders.

In one case, the officers were responding to a telephone tip to the detachment by a member of the public who reportedly overheard



Joyriders in the Clearwater River – later charged
PHOTO: © W. HOWSE



Evidence of OHV use on trails in the Bighorn during annual closure period. PHOTO: © S. NICHOLS