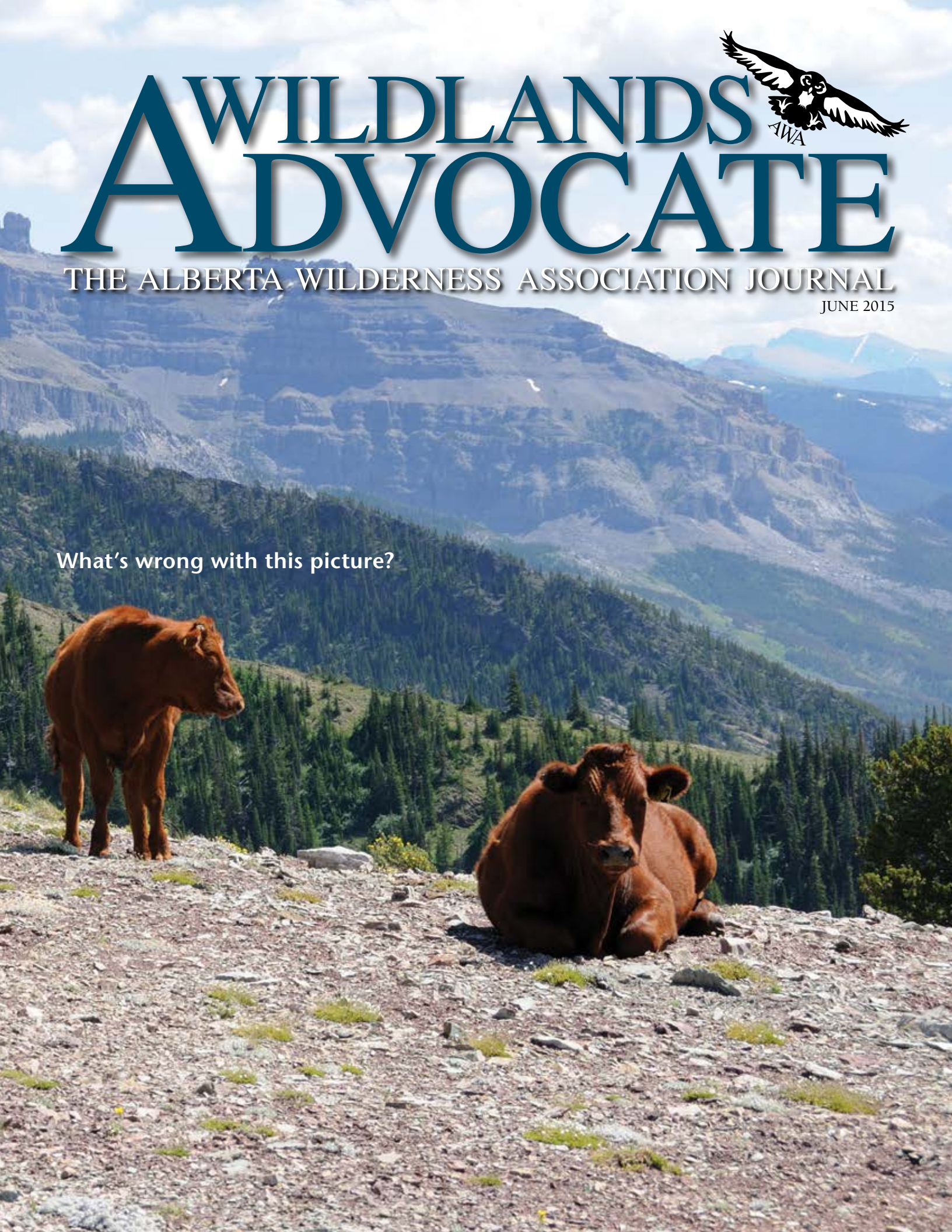
WILDLANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

JUNE 2015



What's wrong with this picture?

CONTENTS

JUNE 2015 • VOL. 23, NO. 3

Features

Association News

Wilderness Watch

Departments

Events

Cover Photo

No, the cover photo isn't a product of Photoshop. Jim Lucas took this photo of cows resting during their ascent of Whistle Mountain in the South Castle Valley. Windsor Ridge and Castle Mt. Peak are in the background.
PHOTO: © J. LUCAS

Featured Artist: Philip Kanwischer

Philip is a wildlife and fine art photographer based in Calgary Alberta. He studied at The Alberta College of Art and Design and through the course of experimentation and influence from the environments that surround him he has honed his style and process. The majority of his work is rooted in representations of the wild. As a conservationist much of his work is a commentary on human influence and the fragility of nature.

His use of models subverts the vulnerability we traditionally associate with the animals we take for granted. An intimate interaction between the subject and the animal is cast, equalizing them. His process is to fully immerse himself in nature, forming a connection and understanding with his surroundings that can only be unlocked with time. Patience is crucial. Art cannot be rushed, just as nature cannot be rushed or controlled. He sees each image as a triumph and as capturing a magical moment that cannot be predicted or replicated, each interaction with an animal is highly personal. He elevates these photos post-production using intricate compositing to reinterpret a wild image. Ultimately he wants to convey the beautiful land we live in and encourage people to have respect for the wild and its beautiful inhabitants. Please visit Philip's website at philipkanwischer.com

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Fair Questions

Familiar with Monty Python's "Flying Sheep" sketch? It's the one where a passerby, noticing sheep in a rather peculiar location, asks a farmer: "Why are they up in the trees?"

"A fair question," replies the farmer, "and one that in recent weeks has been much on my mind." It turns out that Harold, a clever sheep, is responsible. Harold, you see, "realized the sheep's life consists of standing around for a few months and then being eaten" – a pretty depressing realization for an ambitious sheep like Harold. Learning to fly is how Harold and his followers plan to escape the stew pot.

Escaping the slaughterhouse – I could sympathize with such an explanation for the mountaineering cattle featured on this month's cover. Alas, that's not the case. As Nigel Douglas points out in his article on cows in the Castle the cattle are in the alpine because government allows it. The alpine environment is about as well adapted to cope with grazing cows as sheep are to flight. Why does the government allow cattle into the front range canyons of the Castle? Seems like a fair question to me.

My summary of former Progressive Conservative minister Ted Morton's 2014 Martha Kostuch lecture invites you to consider asking a question or two about who gets to pocket the compensation fees petroleum companies pay for their work on our public lands, Crown lands leased to ranchers. How much of this money should ranchers get? Should any of the tens of millions paid in such compensation go into a Rural Conservation and Stewardship fund?

Is it possible to ranch in predator-friendly ways? That's the question animating Carolyn Campbell's examination of the pioneering efforts of Joe Engelhart and Louise Liebenberg. What will it take to nudge this vital Alberta industry in that direction?

In a similar vein Sean Nichols looks at the very successful BearSmart program in the Crowsnest Pass. Can we manage bear behaviour in ways that reduce the number of bear kills, the number of bear relocations, the number of bear encounters, and the amount of time spent dealing with bear complaints? The Crowsnest BearSmart program speaks very well to how we might better share the land with wildlife.

Last issue we introduced you to Lu Carbyn's reservations about trying to reintroduce bison into Banff National Park. This month we offer you a more optimistic ecological appraisal by Dennis Jorgensen who works on bison issues for the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Is bison reintroduction a good idea? Tell us what you think.

More fair questions are raised by Jim Pissot in his report on a talk about the US grizzly recovery efforts that Chris Servheen delivered during May's Black Bear Workshop in Canmore. What should we learn from the American experience?

Fair questions abound too in the open letter reprinted here from former senior Parks Canada officials about the Lake Louise Ski Area Guidelines; Niall Fink tells us these questions were plentiful during the Thinking Mountains 2015 conference in Jasper; Brittany Verbeek offers a preview of what this summer's AWA kid's camp will invite the next generation of conservationists to consider asking in their search for a more sustainable life.

Here's hoping that in the August issue we'll be reporting on some fair answers to these and other fair questions AWA has posed to industry and government.

-Ian Urquhart, Editor

The Sky Shouldn't Be The Limit:

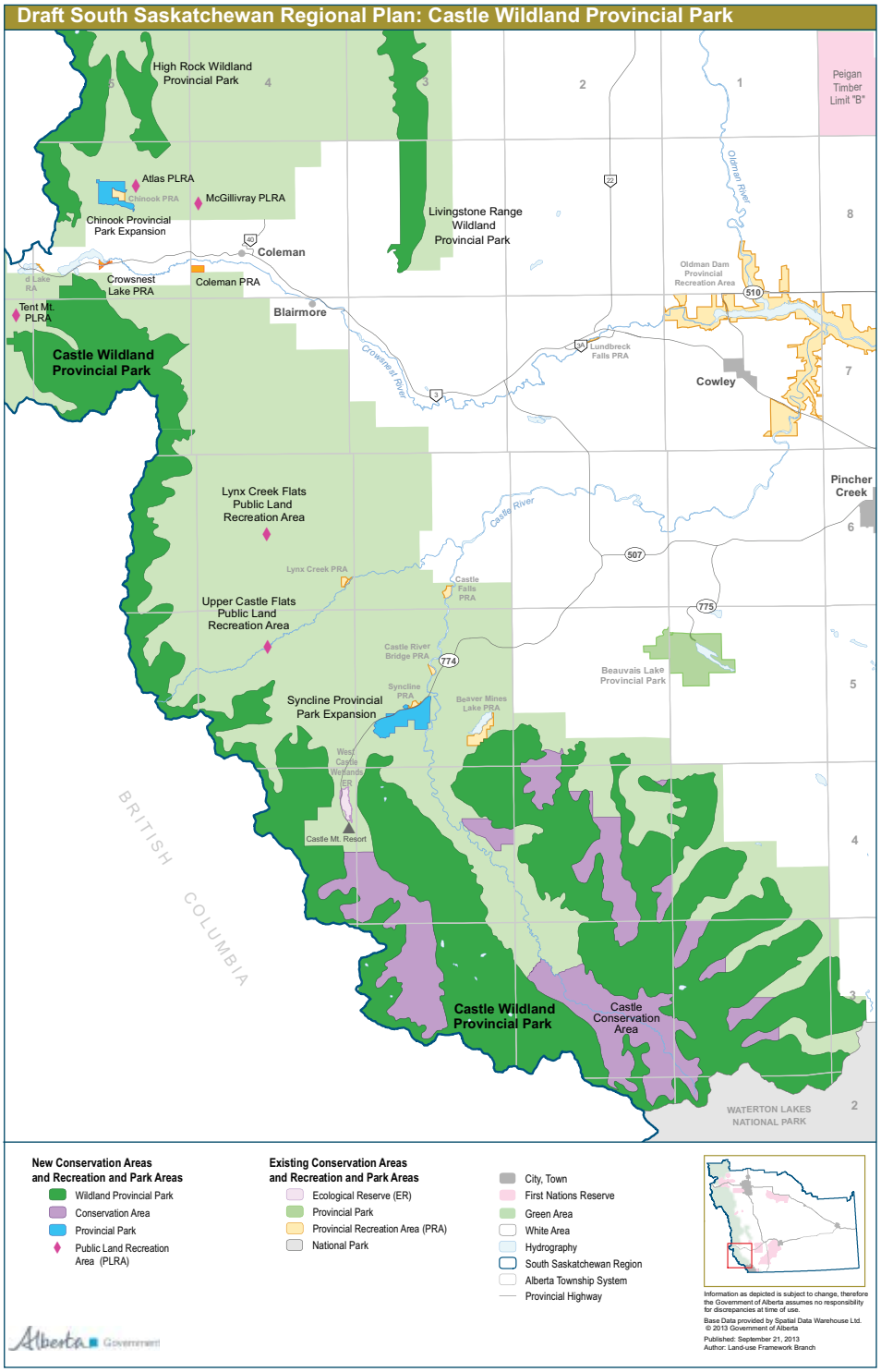
Cattle in the Castle

By Nigel Douglas

The Front Range Canyons of southwestern Alberta's Castle region are special places; deeply-cut valleys run in parallel from the high mountains westwards out towards the prairies. Hiking up one of the canyons takes you on a steady and continuous climb from the sub-alpine valley bottoms, through increasingly-scattered trees until you emerge into the glorious open vistas of the high alpine.

Take a look at a map of the Castle Wildland Provincial Park as proposed in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (dark green on the map), and the eastern edge of the park shows a series of (paler green)"fingers" of land encroaching into the protected Wildland. These are the Front Range Canyons, which are all subject to the lower level of protection afforded by "Provincial Park" status. This lesser level of recognition to some extent reflects their industrial heritage with oil and gas access roads carved deep into each canyon. But another factor may be a history of over grazing which has served to diminish the canyons' natural values, suppressing native flora and replacing them with a host of invasive plants and placing a very heavy burden on these crucial watersheds.

For many years AWA has offered guided backpacking trips into the Castle's Front Range Canyons and dozens of visitors have had the opportunity to experience this breathtaking landscape. But though this land is all public land, long recognized for its wildlife, recreation, and watershed value, all is not wine and roses in the canyons. In the southern canyons, particularly Spionkop and Yarrow, visitors are increasingly reporting the damage caused by persistent overgrazing.



Alpine plants manage to survive in harsh conditions, with icy temperatures, high winds and minimal soil cover. They are extremely sensitive to disturbance; while conscientious two-legged visitors can avoid causing too much damage, cattle may exact a heavy toll. PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

In an October 13, 2014 letter to Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD), AWA passed on the deep concerns expressed to us by our supporters who have visited the canyons. These concerns included:

- The trampling of tree and plant life on the valley floor. "This was so bad that the historic trail in many places in the upper part of the valley is now indistinguishable from dozens of other "trails" through the trees created by cattle."
- The presence of large amounts of cow dung throughout the valley. "Although having some dung is undoubtedly a natural part of the ecosystem the problem seems to be that large numbers of cattle are returning to the same area year after year and are adding to the deposits faster than they can decompose."
- The trampling of the banks and stream bed of the main creek and some of its tributaries; and the pollution of this vital water source.

Wendy Ryan of the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition has noted the same problems. "The overgrazing has probably been going on since SRD (then Sustainable Resource Development) first allowed cattle into the Front Range Canyons," she says. "The cattle enjoy being up in the forested area of the canyons and up in the high alpine, getting away from the flies, bugs, and heat."

Six years ago, in a 2009 report titled *Livestock grazing in the Front Range Canyons,* botanist and AWA member Reg Ernst made exactly the same point. "Because alpine and sub-alpine systems did not evolve under intensive, season-long grazing," he wrote, "they are particularly vulnerable to the damage caused by a disturbance which they have little or no defence against." Reg observed that: "Over many decades of cattle grazing, the plant communities along all stream corridors and valley bottoms in the Castle area (where grazing occurs) have been altered to a mix of non-native grasses, weeds and other invasive plants, and native forbs and shrubs. Some native grasses are still present but are a minor component in the community."

His report highlighted a number of problems associated with cattle grazing in the upper sub-alpine and alpine natural regions. They included:

- **Loss of native grass species.** "Non-native plant species are detrimental to native plant communities because they displace desirable native species resulting in a loss of wildlife habitat. For example, rough fescue (Festuca campestris), the dominant native grass species on climax plant communities in the Front Range Canyons, provides nutritious winter forage to a variety of wildlife including elk and bighorn sheep. Conversely, tame forage species make very poor winter forage because

after they senesce in mid to late summer, they have very low nutritional value."

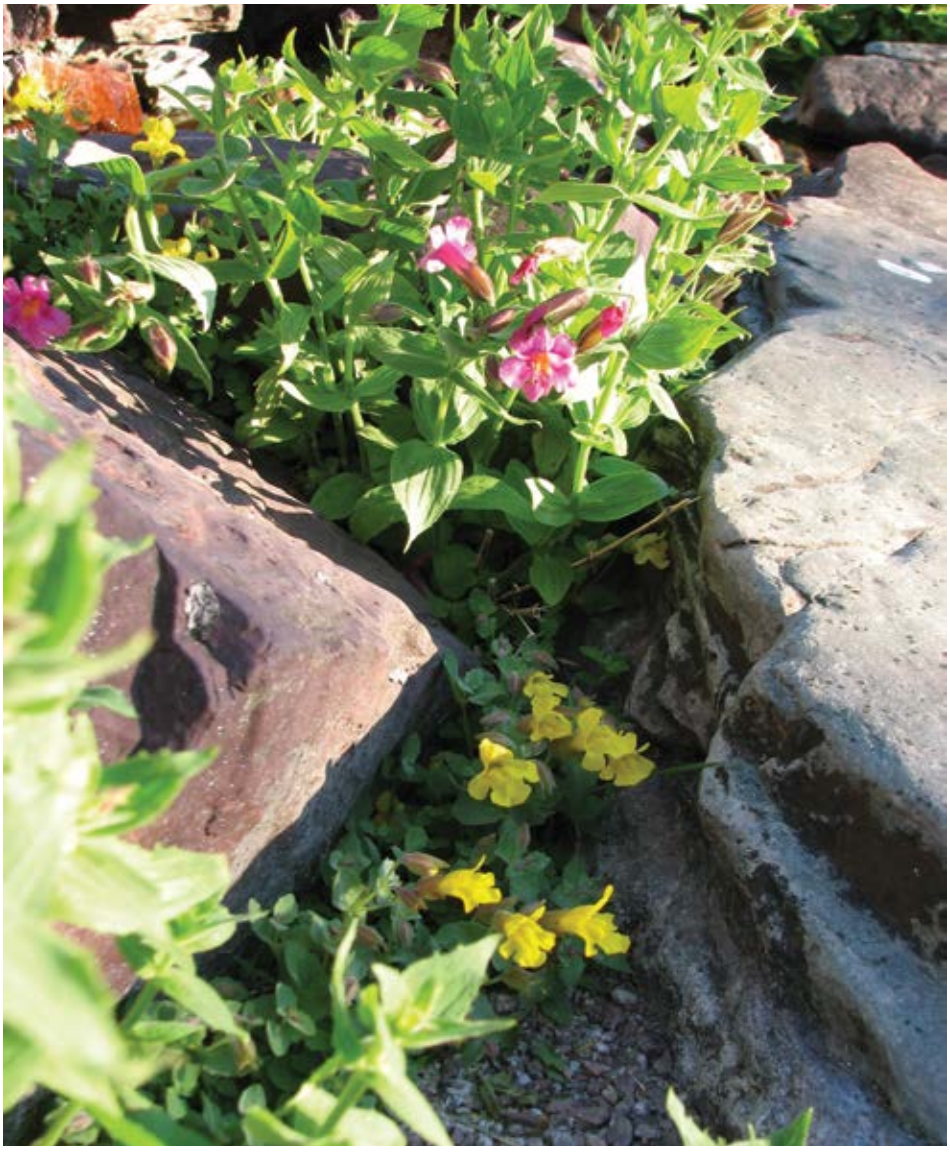
- **Loss of rare plants.** "A large proportion of the rare plants in the Castle area are found in the upper sub-alpine and alpine natural regions. These species are threatened because cattle grazing increases the density and distribution of competitive non-native plants and because of the physical damage caused by hoof trampling, particularly along riparian habitats where cattle have a tendency to congregate."
- **Invasive weeds.** "Noxious and other weeds are particularly damaging to native plant communities because they have little nutritional value, they are invasive and readily displace valuable native species, and because their inferior soil binding properties allow soil erosion to occur."
- **Watershed damage.** "Riparian areas receive a disproportionate amount of use by cattle and activity related to this use degrades the streamside environment and the local fishery." Weeds and agronomics have poor soil-binding properties compared to native species. This means there is an increase in soil erosion which degrades the watershed and damages fish habitat. Most of southern Alberta depends on healthy mountain watersheds to provide water for both the urban and agricultural communities."

In theory, grazing cattle are supposed to be prevented from accessing the sensitive high alpine areas, but enforcement in the southern canyons is minimal. Drift fencing has been erected across the heads of the valleys in the past but it is rarely maintained, and overworked ESRD officials show little appetite for getting to grips with the issue. Ryan refers to the Spionkop valley as "an oasis… and a mess. Every time I have been up there, the cattle have trampled the entire area by the falls, and eaten every wildflower and plant by the water." The cattle "travel up these valleys on old industry roads until they reach the end of the trail, and then stay up there all season."

In a November 2014 letter to AWA, ESRD Minister Kyle Fawcett pointed out that graziers on public land are required to stick to a *Grazing Lease Stewardship Code of Practice*, but there is little evidence that this code is being applied on the ground. Theoretically, graziers are "required to apply sustainable grazing practices" on their lease," with the requirement that "any rangeland grazing system must consider how to balance livestock needs with the available forage supply through proper stocking rates." The code highlights the importance of careful management of grazing in riparian areas: "Riparian areas where livestock may find succulent forage, drinking water and shade require extra effort to ensure good livestock distribution and prevent potential negative effects…Grazing leaseholders have a particularly critical responsibility to address any riparian area management issues on their grazing lease."

Rangeland health assessments are occasionally carried out on grazing leases, but past assessments in the Front Range Canyons seem to have made little difference to the grazing problems noted by visitors to the canyons.

AWA has long supported a cost/ benefit analysis of grazing on public land, and in the Castle in particular. The minimal amount of income derived from leasing our public land in no way justifies the considerable cost of the damage to natural habitats and watersheds. If lease fees do not generate adequate income to allow provincial staff to monitor grazing adequately, then they should either be substantially increased, or grazing suspended until adequate oversight can be introduced to ensure that future grazing is truly sustainable.



Rare plants such as red and yellow monkeyflower, which grow alongside creeks, may suffer heavily from cattle grazing. PHOTO: © N. DOUGLAS

Ranchers and Wolves:

A Better Way

By Carolyn Campbell, *AWA Conservation Specialist*

In the fall of 2014 I was lucky to meet two Alberta 'pioneers' I have admired for some time. They're not the homesteader-type pioneer, but pioneers in the sense that they raise large herds of cattle and sheep in wilder parts of Alberta, while taking deliberate actions to co-exist with wolves. One lives in the rolling foothills of southwest Alberta, the other adjacent to a Wildland Provincial Park in the Peace country. Their attitudes and actions are a powerful inspiration for conservation-minded ranchers and all who value our large wild carnivores as part of what makes Alberta special.

Joe Engelhart is a range rider who works on the extensive public lands grazing leases of the Spruce Ranch Cooperative, south of Longview. The leaseholders count on him to keep watch on about 2,000 cow-calf pairs and 500 yearlings. He continues the long, proud tradition of the professional cowboy, but with a 21st century outlook. He's a steward for the health of grazing lands and stream corridors and does as much as possible to reduce wolf and grizzly conflicts with cattle.

In 2003, a few years after Joe began working on the ranch, there were serious predation problems by the local wolf pack, named the Willow Creek pack: they lost 20 head of cattle to wolves. To put that in perspective, in a typical year they might lose 30 head to poisonous plants. But the stress to the livestock and the spike in predation was a problem they had to address. Biologist Charles Mamo, who had worked with other ranchers, came and collared some of the wolves. Joe learned how pack members used different areas, and he was fascinated by how close the wolves were at times, without his knowing it.

The members of that pack, habituated to killing cattle, were almost all eventually shot or trapped. The last collared female paired up with a male from outside the area, and they became the alpha pair that re-established the Willow Creek pack. However, this time the terms were different. Joe watched their movements, was aware of den and rendezvous sites, and he managed cattle to minimize opportunities for predators. Although there are no radio collars on local wolves anymore, he continues to keep a close watch out for signs of wolves, bears and other wildlife in the area.

"Having a human presence out on the land is really important," he told me. "I can reach all our lands in a long day's ride." Joe is out on the ranges most days. He works with hardy, high-stamina herding dogs developed in New Zealand called Huntaways. They don't defend against predators directly, but they keep the cows closer together and are essential in moving them from one area to the next.

"Wolves will take advantage of opportunities. Yearling cows are curious, inexperienced and somewhat reckless. I try not to put them out on the far west pastures anymore, or at least mix older, more experienced cattle in with them. Mother cows have better instincts to defend themselves and their calves. I use cross fences to keep cattle in an area, or a few more riders would do the job if you wanted fewer fences. As we're able, we're using less 3-strand barbed wire and more 2-strand electric on the closer fields, which is effective and better for wildlife." Predation from wolves has been very low, with only one confirmed wolf livestock kill since 2008.

Louise works with Sarplaninac livestock guardian dogs, which in her experience have the right mix of aggression towards predators, calmness with humans, and bonding capacity with livestock. PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL

The Alberta government sets the terms of a compensation program for livestock producers who have stock either killed or injured by bears, wolves, cougars or eagles. When a producer suspects a predator-caused incident, a fish and wildlife enforcement officer comes to investigate. If, in the officer's opinion, the evidence points to a confirmed or probable predator kill or injury, a claim is filed. For a confirmed predation, the producer is paid the average commercial value for the animal when it was killed, with a minimum payment of $400. For cattle less than a year old, a producer can choose compensation based on average prices the following October for a 550 pound animal. For a probable predation case, the producer is paid 50% of the loss if a confirmed kill by the same species is found within 10 kilometres and within 90 days before or after the incident. In mid-2014, the Alberta government reported to rural municipalities that "during the last three years, total annual compensation payments averaged $267,000 with 12 per cent of claims denied. Denied claims could have resulted from ineligible livestock or predators and/or lack of evidence." There are no requirements to have predator deterrents in place.

The Alberta Conservation Association traditionally funded all predator compensation payments from hunting and fishing license fees, but payments have risen in recent years due to cattle prices and predation incidents. In 2014-15, the federal government is providing half of the program funding.

Alberta Wildlife Predator Compensation Program Incidents and Payments

Source: Alberta Conservation Association Annual Reports

	Wolf	Grizzly	Black Bear	Cougar	Eagle	Unidentified Predator	Total
Claims							
2013-14	167	53	15	18	3	11	267
2012-13	74	17	10	14	3	4	122
2011-12	176	20	16	12	0	4	228
2010-11	162	10	12	21	0	3	208
2009-10	127	10	7	8	3	19	174
Compensation, 000$							
2013-14	221	73	17	4	3	8	326
2012-13	83	19	12	8	1	3	126
2011-12	219	23	24	4	0	3	274
2010-11	165	9	10	9	0	2	194
2009-10	107	15	4	5	1	12	144

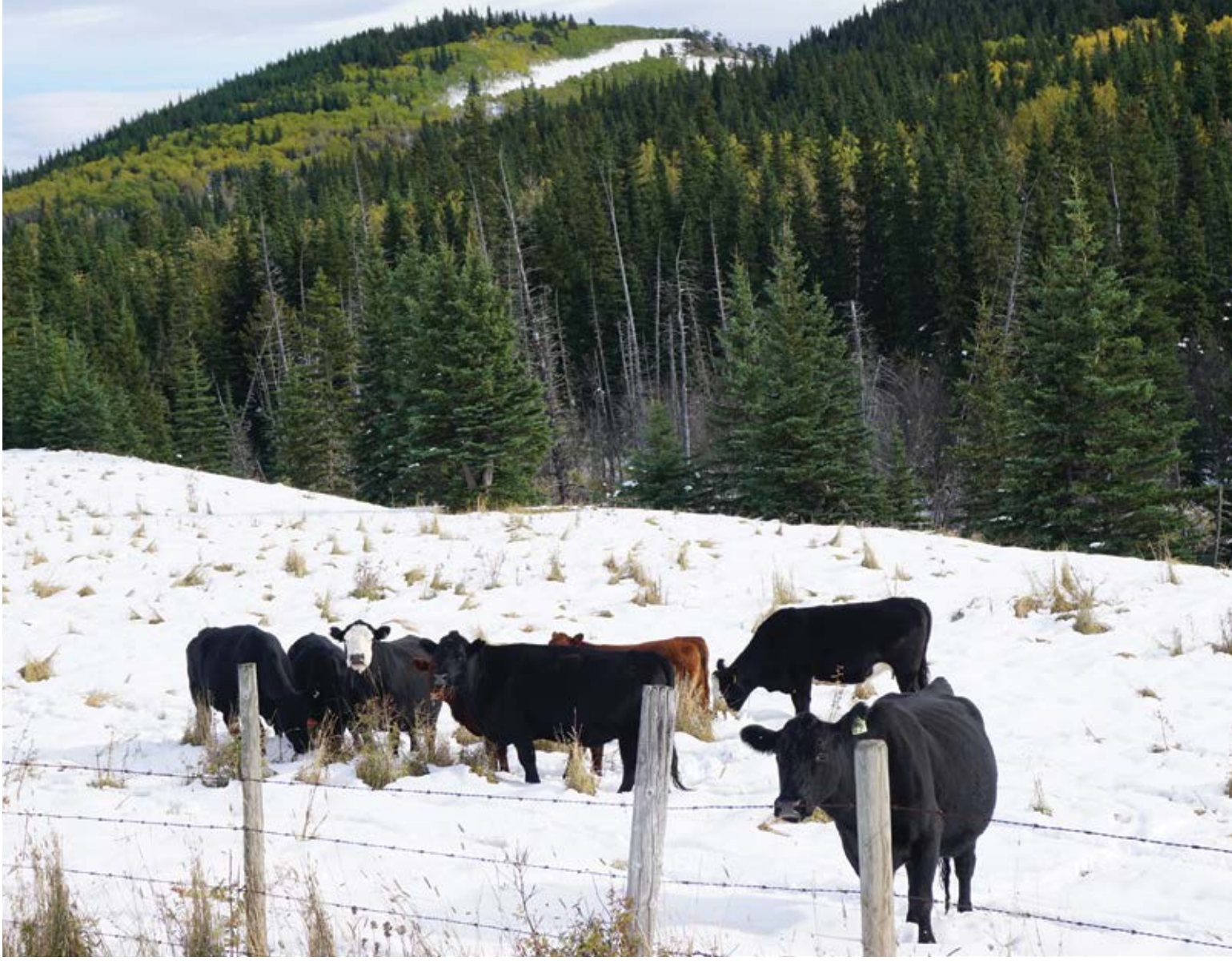
Note: Statistics Canada reports that between 2010 and 2014, the July 1 inventory of beef cattle on Alberta farms (cow-calf plus feeder-stocker operations, so excluding feedlots) was 4.3 million, give or take 100,000, and the July 1 inventory of sheep on Alberta farms was 200,000, give or take 5,000.

Alberta's predator compensation program (see inset) reduces livestock producers' financial loss from predation. Like many in the southwest Alberta ranching community, Joe supports somewhat higher payout rates to recognize rancher risks and loss. He also supports adding stronger incentives for producers to reduce predator opportunities and attractants. Through partnerships such as the Waterton Biosphere carnivore program, many ranchers in the southern foothills have been Alberta leaders in programs such as secure storage and removal of stock carcasses. But there are no requirements to have these or other predator deterrents in place to qualify for compensation.

Joe strongly believes that livestock-habituated, problem wolves have to be killed, but with measured and humane methods. He values having a stable wolf pack in the area. As he sees it, random killing of non-problem wolves could cause a splinter pack to form or could bring in new wolves that cause more problems.

There is no wolf bounty sponsored by the municipal government on the grazing leases where Joe rides. However, at least 10 rural municipalities in Alberta now pay amounts from $15 to $500 per wolf killed within their districts, on public lands up to 8 kilometres away from grazing leases, or in some cases on traplines. The provincial government has authority over wildlife management, yet it looked the other way as this wave of new wolf bounties occurred since 2010. FOIPed documents obtained by AWA in 2011 revealed that the provincial carnivore specialist advised internally that indiscriminate bounties are ineffective. Wolves have high reproduction and dispersal capabilities, and wolves that aren't preying on livestock may be replaced by wolves that will. Subsequently, fish and wildlife officers quietly told several municipalities that bounties were ineffective in reducing predation.

Although there is little transparency about the scale of these bounties, AWA has compiled records indicating that municipal governments have paid out over $315,000 to kill at least 1,100 wolves since 2010. Not surprisingly, there is no evidence that overall wolf populations or predation incidents have declined since bounties came into effect. There is also no information available about the harmful bykill to non-target species from use of inhumane and indiscriminate snares that are baited to catch wolves. In 2013 and 2014, international wolf scientists with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) called on the Alberta government to replace its outdated, ineffective bounties with modern, evidence-based management. The reply from ESRD Minister Robin Campbell was to suggest the scientists take their issues



To reduce opportunities for wolves in the rolling foothills landscape, Joe puts the older, more experienced cows rather than curious yearlings out on the further pastures.
PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL

to the municipalities. To date, the Alberta government cites the substantial overall Alberta wolf population as its rationale for dodging its responsibility to redirect wolf predation concerns into effective deterrent and management practices.

In northwest Alberta, Louise Liebenberg and her family have built the Grazerie, a thriving sheep and cattle ranching business, using a comprehensive approach to deter wolf and coyote predation. They had grazed sheep in the Netherlands and moved to Canada in search of wilder open spaces. They own 460 acres (about 200 hectares), half of which is open, half of which is forested and bushy close to a Wildland Provincial Park; they rent another 800 acres (or 300 hectares) of hay and pasture land. The Grazerie raises about 600 ewes with their lambs, and 50 cattle. "Ranchers own a lot of real estate and need to be prepared to share their lands," Louise told me as we walked out to a pasture. "I have a responsibility to create areas on our ranch where wildlife, including predators, can exist. I also have a responsibility to keep our cattle and sheep safe."

Reducing attractants and deterring predators is a cornerstone of their operations. Lambing takes place in heated pens in a large barn. The Grazerie removes all carcasses and other attractants to an on-farm composting area they have constructed. Out in the fields, active human presence and the constant watch of eight to ten guardian dogs establish a strong deterrent. The sheep are managed to stay closer together rather than scattering widely. Adult guardian dogs remain with the flocks and swiftly deter any wolves or coyotes who test boundaries. As evening approaches, Louise or her husband work with border collies to bring the sheep into electric-fenced night corrals, and guardian dogs remain with the flock all night. During calving season, the guardian dogs are 'on duty' out in the field with expectant mother cows to ensure that any predators keep their distance.

Her choice of livestock guardian dog is the Sarplaninac. This breed originates from mountainous Macedonia in former Yugoslavia, where shepherds and dogs still work closely together to keep their flocks safe from wolves and bears. In her experience, this dog breed combines the right level of aggression towards larger preda-

tors, calmness around human handlers, and a strong capacity for bonding with sheep. Louise now raises pups to renew the Grazerie's guardian dog 'corps', and for other producers. When I visited in autumn 2014, the pups born early that year were in with the rams.

"I am predator friendly, but my dogs are not. They are there to ensure that the wolf or coyote realizes it isn't worth the trouble, and moves on." The Grazerie is in a rural municipality that has had a wolf bounty of $300 per adult wolf since 2011. As a result, coyotes are the more common predator in the immediate vicinity now. In late 2013 a large coyote made the wrong choice, entering a night corral and her dogs quickly dispatched it. In five years, Louise has lost one ewe and three lambs to predation. "And that was my fault, I had locked my dogs up in another part of the ranch. The coyote of course is an opportunist."

The Grazerie is the first ranch in Canada to be certified Wildlife Friendly and Predator Friendly. Louise maintains a fascinating blog about ranch life, including how their predator deterrence is applied year round. She doesn't believe the designation provides an economic benefit, as their products are too far from specialized markets to command a premium. But she values the Predator Friendly certification as a useful way to start conversations with other ranchers on co-existing responsibly with predators. "There are a lot of conservation-minded ranchers out there, and this can help plant that seed, that they don't have to fear making the change."

Joe works with hardy Huntaway herding dogs to keep the cattle he manages relatively close together and to move them between fields. PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL

Louise believes that killing a wolf that has been habituated to constantly prey on livestock is justified, but it should be the last option to use, not the first. She was one of the very few who spoke up publicly against her municipality's wolf bounty. In her view, the funds would be much better spent helping producers with incentives to reduce the root causes of predation. "Why couldn't municipal governments use those funds to assist ranchers to change, by sponsoring the cost of livestock guardian dogs and on-farm composting facilities?" she asks.

Louise is a strong advocate for ranching. Her challenge to AWA and other conservation groups is to become visibly stronger allies of ranchers on public lands, to support practical steps that improve livelihoods as well as the environment. In central Idaho's Sawtooth National Forest, a partnership of ranchers, three levels of government, and local wolf advocates has worked for six years, amidst wolf pack ranges, on effective non-lethal methods such as guardian dogs and electric fencing. One hundred thousand sheep and lambs have grazed across this project area, yet fewer than 30 sheep have been killed in the six years. A three-year South African scientific study of 11 farms, published in 2014, found that adopting non-lethal predator control yielded significant cost savings to livestock producers. The co-authors suggest the "use of [lethal] controls is influenced by the attitudes of farmers and their neighbours as much as by any realized economic advantages." Joe Engelhart, Louise Liebenberg, and other conservation-minded ranchers are at the forefront of these changing attitudes in Alberta. By seeking responsible government wildlife management, and by highlighting their success, AWA hopes many other producers will join them if practicing predator friendly ranching.

The Inside Scoop:

Looking Back at the 2014 Martha Kostuch Lecture

By Ian Urquhart

I know…this report on Dr. Ted Morton's November 2014 Martha Kostuch Lecture was almost as long in coming as the major land-use legislation passed by Ed Stelmach's Progressive Conservative government in 2009. Morton ushered that law, the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA), through the legislature. The former minister recounted to a full house at Hillhurst Cottage School last November how he regards that law as one important success of his tenure as Sustainable Resource Development Minister.

Morton, who was SRD Minister for just over three years beginning in 2006, gave AWA members something of an insider's account of his time in one of Alberta's key "conservation" ministries. He recounted the challenges he faced, the successes he had, as well as the challenges and opportunities he thinks are part of Alberta's conservation landscape.

I was optimistic when Ed Stelmach appointed Morton to the SRD portfolio in December 2006. Morton was kin. We both have PhDs in Political Science and I admired his intellect. *Charter Politics,* the book he co-authored in 1992 with his University of Calgary colleague Rainer Knopff, remains an important contribution to understanding the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and its place in Canadian politics and society. I taught constitutional law and politics and especially admired its balance, the fact he and Knopff kept in check their antipathy to the Charter and the negative changes they associated with it.

We were kin in perhaps a important sense. We grew up in spectacular natural settings, Morton in Wyoming and me in southeastern B.C. We loved the outdoors and doing the things teenage boys of our generation with those inclinations did: hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping. While we probably don't share many political "heroes" one we both admire is Teddy Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States. Roosevelt led America into the Progressive Era and made stewardship of natural resources a hallmark of his eight years in the White House. His experiences in the American West helped shape his commitment to natural resource stewardship, to trying to ensure that the condition of natural resources passed on to the next generation was at least as healthy as it was when the current generation was entrusted with it. Such progressive conservatism hasn't fared well in the history of Alberta politics. Morton, seeing himself as a Roosevelt conservative, tried to bring those stewardship sensibilities to his job as Minister.

SHE, Leadership, and Revenues

In Morton's experience many of the challenges facing the conservationist agenda are financial ones. Conservation policy initiatives run into strong political headwinds when they try to compete with SHE – social program, health, and education spending. SHE spending consumed more than two-thirds of the Stelmach era budget and even more of a politician's time for one very simple reason – that's where the votes are. Those are the issues Alberta voters care most about and so they're what MLAs and cabinet ministers focus most of their attention on. The successes he identified in his talk were realized because they didn't cost much, were funded by some other source, or were funded by windfall resource revenues between 2005 and 2008. Sometimes they also were issues where political leadership – exercised by Morton and/or Premier Stelmach – played a vital role.

Successes

The former Minister counted the OH Ranch and the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* among what I would call the major landscape policy successes of his time in SRD. ALSA was a policy initiative that sprouted out of the Progressive Conservative leadership race in 2006. It arguably was the Stelmach government's single most important land-use initiative and grappled with the perennial pressures the contemporary Alberta landscape faces from population growth and industrialization. Morton was very committed to seeing the Progressive Conservatives respond to those pressures. His leadership, the Premier's support, and beliefs that the administrative and economic costs of the initiative wouldn't be too severe helped to ensure its passage through the legislature.

The OH Ranch story struck me as a particularly powerful example of how, even during the Progressive Conservative

dynasty, committed political leadership could trump Energy – the 800-pound gorilla in Alberta policy-making circles. Morton saw what a jewel the OH Ranch, west of Longview, was when he hunted elk there in the 1980s. Doc Seamans, owner of the ranch, agreed to put conservation easements on the portions of the ranch he owned if the Alberta government would designate the ranch's grazing leases as a Heritage Ranchland. Morton very much wanted to turn this 4,277-hectare property into a conservation victory. "My biggest obstacle," he recounted, "was the Minister of Energy and the bureaucrats in Energy. They were afraid that if you put this Heritage Rangeland status on the Crown land that would put restrictions on future oil and gas development, and it would." According to Morton Premier Stelmach was a vital ally when it came to overriding Energy. The Premier was concerned about his political support in southern Alberta and saw conserving the OH Ranch lands as a measure that could bolster his popularity in that part of the province. The fact the financial costs to the treasury of creating this Heritage Rangeland were unknown made the decision even more palatable.

What of the Future? Financing Conservation With "Cowboy Welfare" Loot

Looking ahead, Morton sees a political terrain dotted with conservation challenges and opportunities. Population growth and economic growth remain prominent challenges there. New petroleum exploitation technologies such as hydraulic fracturing may accentuate some conservation challenges in parts of the province – such as water availability and allocation in southern Alberta. The possibility of continued budget deficits may make funding new conservation programs more difficult since AWA's priorities still have to compete with health, education, and social programs.

PHOTO: © J. QUIROZ

AWA members and other readers of *Wild Lands Advocate* may recall the phrase "cowboy welfare" from a previous Kostuch lecture delivered by Bob Scammell (see the December 2011 issue of *WLA* for a discussion of Bob's lecture). Bob's focus was on what he called the "public lands crisis" in Alberta; the province's grazing lease system for Crown/public lands and its resemblance in some respects to a system of cowboy welfare was critical to Bob's analysis. Among other points, Bob maintained that some grazing leaseholders receive unjustified financial windfalls courtesy of the provincial government. The windfalls come as the financial compensation cheques petroleum companies write for their activities on your Crown lands. These payments go directly to leaseholders, not to the government. He believed these payments should go into the public purse, nor private pockets. If a leaseholder's cattle operations were damaged by oil and gas activity then the rancher could approach the government for a fair share of those payments.

Although Morton never referred to Bob's remarks, his lecture strongly supported Bob's conclusions. The former minister used the phrase "unjust enrichment" to describe what Alberta's financial compensation system delivers to a small number of leaseholders. Morton sits on the board of the Alberta Land Institute and he gave his audience a preview of what he claims a forthcoming Institute study will conclude about surface disturbance payments (Morton told his audience that the study would be released by early 2015. It still hasn't appeared. Dr. Vic Adamowicz, the research director for the Alberta Land Institute, says the study will be released some time this fall.).

According to Morton, forty-five percent of grazing leaseholders don't receive surface disturbance payments for oil and gas wells on the lands they lease from the province. In fact, he claims only a very small percentage of leaseholders, two percent, collect a staggering 50 percent of all the oil and gas well surface disturbance payments. To underline this point he gave his audience the example of one leaseholder with more than 800 wells on those public lands. That leaseholder collected more than $1.2 million in disturbance payments. To add insult to this situation the former Minister said

he could guarantee this leaseholder paid a small fraction of this amount per year in grazing fees to the government. This is precisely the type of situation Bob Scammell asserted was at the centre of the public lands crisis he feels characterizes contemporary Alberta.

While we wait to see if the Alberta Land Institute confirms Morton's charges please consider the July 2015 analysis and report presented by Merwan Saher, Alberta's Auditor General. That report describes the same sort of situation pointed to by Scammell in 2011 and Morton in November 2014. "Some leaseholders receive significant compensation for allowing operators onto leased public land," the Auditor General wrote, "or from selling or transferring their lease to another leaseholder. *In some cases the amount of surface compensation paid to leaseholders…is many times the amount of the rent they pay on a grazing lease."* (my emphasis) Compare those words to the former Minister's claim that a relatively small number of grazing leaseholders in eastern Alberta pay the government "X amount of dollars to raise their cows on Crown land and they collect five and ten times X in surface disturbance payments from companies that drill wells or put pipelines there."

Or compare Morton's example above of the gross disparity between lease fees paid to the people of Alberta and surface disturbance payments handed over to leaseholders with what the Auditor General estimated. With respect to 54 leases covering 10 percent of the Crown land leased for grazing he concluded: "They received about $2.7 million more in access compensation fees than the $326,000 they paid in lease rents to the province."

Both Saher's report and Morton's lecture compare Alberta's system with the grazing lease system in Saskatchewan. Saher notes that in Saskatchewan, unlike in Alberta, surface lease rentals are paid to the government, not to leaseholders. In the 2014-15 fiscal year Saskatchewan collected $11.5 million in surface lease rentals; Alberta didn't collect a penny.

Morton spoke more prescriptively than Saher did. The former Minister sees the Saskatchewan model as one that Alberta should adopt. It's a model he believes the Alberta Land Institute study will show would generate approximately $40 million per year. These funds should be dedicated to promoting conservation and stewardship issues in rural Alberta. Given his view of how concentrated the benefits of the current regime in Alberta are – where very few grazing leaseholders secure the lion's share of access compensation – Morton believed the policy shift towards the Saskatchewan approach is politically feasible. If you agree with his suggestion that compensation payments for accessing Crown lands should be devoted to conservation and stewardship purposes – as his AWA audience last November did – then let's hope the new government will address this dimension of Alberta's public lands crisis.

Featured Artist Philip Kanwischer

Unity

Falling

An Ecologist's Optimism On the Proposed Introduction of Bison to Banff National Park

By Dennis Jorgensen, ***Vice-Chair IUCN North American Bison Specialist Group***

In a time in which the greatest challenge to conservation is the 6th mass extinction in the history of life on Earth, I'm surprised when some dedicated conservationists argue that a native species should not be reintroduced because they would thrive and proliferate to the point of requiring management to regulate their abundance. As someone who works to conserve and restore species, if I could have my choice of wildlife management problems, it would be this one: successfully reintroducing a species to the point where we must manage their numbers to limit their abundance. What a rare and wonderful problem to have in an era where we fight daily just to hold onto the incredible diversity of species that time and evolution have yielded. Despite the century-long absence of bison managed as wildlife in the greater Banff ecosystem, bison were once one of the most widespread large mammals in the history of North America. To suggest, as Dr. Carbyn did, that they would now be an invasive species is just plain wrong in my opinion. It amounts to blaming bison for being the last of North America's large ungulates to be the focus of such restoration efforts.

The near extermination of the North American bison in the late 1800s was a concerted effort to eliminate the species for political and economic gain. It reduced a species that once numbered tens of millions of animals to an estimated 1,000 Wood and Plains bison in North America in 1886. Today, one might ask "why do bison need to be restored anywhere" when bison now appear ubiquitous in North America as a result of the rise of the bison livestock industry. This industry has increased bison numbers to approximately half a million in North America. However, wild Plains bison that exist with a mandate to be managed as wildlife in North America number only 20,000 animals in 62 herds. .Seventy-five percent of those herds consist of fewer than 400 individuals; one-third have fewer than 50 members.

The American Bison Society, established in 1905 by Theodore Roosevelt and William Temple Hornaday, felt their job was done and that recovery was achieved by the 1930s when 20,000 Plains bison were being managed as wildlife. This Society represented the birth of the modern species conservation movement and was a success by most measures of that era. However, the modern science of genetics has revealed that the predominantly small bison populations in North America have steadily lost genetic diversity and, therefore, species health and resilience. In order to secure the recovery of the species as wildlife there is a need to identify sites of sufficient scale to restore bison populations to more than 400 adult bison and, preferably, more than 1,000 adults.

Establishing several large herds of bison to secure the recovery of the species might sound easy given that today the grasslands of North America support approximately 89 million cows managed as livestock. Surely, there is enough grass to go around to establish sufficiently large herds of wild bison to secure their recovery. However, the very success of the livestock industry in replacing bison with cows and becoming the dominant land use on grasslands throughout North America, is the reason it has become difficult to identify sites where there is a willingness to consider "tolerating" the reintroduction of bison. In most cases, in most places, the discussion is a non-starter and it's absolutely necessary to consider other alternatives.

Generally speaking there are two alternatives that become immediately apparent for future bison restoration efforts: National Parks and protected areas located within the historic range of Plains bison, and tribal lands where Aboriginal communities embrace bison as central to their culture and future prosperity. National Parks have both a role and a responsibility to assess

Bison in Custer State Park, South Dakota. PHOTO: © CHARLES R. PETERSON

the critical part they can play in conserving and restoring species that once existed within their boundaries. Despite the challenges and, in some cases, the controversy associated with the management of a species like bison, conservationists prize National Parks for their goal and mandate of being a haven for wildlife species to exist.

There are many proponents in the community of Banff of restoring bison to the landscape. Such an expression of local support is a rare situation among prospective restoration sites in North America and I believe this opportunity must be seized. Reintroducing bison to Banff National Park won't exclude opponents or ignore practical questions of wildlife management. This process would benefit from a community consisting of proponents and opponents and creates fertile ground for a balanced discussion in which actual costs and challenges will be considered.

Both proponents and opponents must be realistic. They should acknowledge that management will be a necessary component of a bison reintroduction and that success will eventually require culling, the potential for strategically erected fences, and the establishment of agreements with adjacent landowners and managers regarding steps that will be taken if bison leave the boundaries of the park. There was a time when National Parks were considered islands of conservation within a sea of alternative land uses, but we have entered an era in which it is increasingly recognized that the success of conservation rests upon community-based conservation efforts in which neighbours are viewed as partners in gauging and managing challenges and success.

As a Calgarian working towards the recovery of bison as wildlife in the United States, I believe it is important for AWA members and their fellow Canadians to recognize just how rare and pivotal the decision to restore bison in Banff could be for the future recovery and health of the species and the ecosystem. For conservationists to suggest that National Parks, one of the last refuges for new and significant progress in the recovery of bison, should refuse them is troubling and difficult to reconcile with the hope and inspiration that success in such an endeavour could hold for the conservation movement as a whole. Living near Yellowstone National Park I recognize that the remarkable success of bison recovery in the park has contributed to daunting management challenges. But I can also attest to the fact that it has produced one of the greatest wildlife spectacles in the world. Bison restoration in Yellowstone serves to demonstrate the value of conservation to millions of people each year and develops new advocates who might not otherwise give conservation a second thought. That's why this ecologist is optimistic about the proposal to reintroduce bison to Banff National Park.

Dennis Jorgensen is the Program Officer, Bison Initiative Coordinator, World Wildlife Fund-US, Northern Great Plains Program

Bison Crossing the Lamar River, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. PHOTO: © CHARLES R. PETERSON

Lessons from the Crowsnest Pass BearSmart Program:

Work with the community, work with the bears

By Sean Nichols, *AWA Conservation Specialist*

When Fish and Wildlife district officer John Clarke got involved with the Crowsnest Pass BearSmart program nine years ago the program had a handful of bear-proof bins to its name and a couple of volunteers. But there was little organizational direction and no-one really seemed to know how to employ these resources.

One of Clarke's first actions after joining the program was to enlist the help of Christy Pool, who was brought on board as the program's Field Supervisor and Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Since that time the program has evolved into one of the most successful, effective, and well-received BearSmart programs in the province. Earlier this year it was selected as a finalist in Alberta's annual Emerald Award competition.

"John just took the program and ran with it," recalls Pool. She relates how, early on, Clarke saw the need for such a program in the community and was committed to do what it took to make it work.

Pool is quick to credit not only Clarke, but all of the volunteers and the community as a whole for the success of the program. Two of the biggest differences she cites between the Crowsnest Pass experience and that in other communities in Alberta involve working with the community, and perhaps surprisingly, working with the bears.

Priority 1: Include the bears

Rather than focusing solely on matters of garbage and attractants, the Crowsnest Pass BearSmart program is proactive about getting out and monitoring the bears themselves. Bears in the vicinity of the municipality are radio-collared and monitored, their movements tracked day and night. BearSmart patrols staffed with program volunteers are active around the clock so that when calls come in, they are already prepared and able to respond more quickly.

On the other hand, if the bears are staying out of trouble and away from problem areas, the BearSmart team wants to know so that they can keep it that way. The focus then is not on keeping bears far away from humans, but only far enough away to avoid conflict. Through the program Alberta Fish and Wildlife established a network of "red zones" around town. As long as the bears stay out of the red zones, they are generally left alone. "After all," explains Pool, "we live in the mountains and the bears live here too."

Priority 2: Include the community

Community buy-in is the other essential component of the program. This is generated through ample volunteer opportunities, as well as education, community events, involvement of school classes, and other forms of engagement. Pool is adamant that success only comes when communities take ownership of programs like BearSmart. "They can see that we aren't only out there speaking on behalf of the bears," she explains, "but that we actually care about the bears. They can see how this is everyone's community."

Pool enthusiastically relates how over time calls are coming in faster and how it has become not just the volunteers but the entire community who excitedly phone in sightings. She describes how the mentality of bear management has changed and improved over time: once the attitude was that bears should be either left alone or shot. Now the community possesses a sense of ownership over the bears themselves and many people in the Crowsnest are able to identify individual ursine residents in the valley.

It is not only the people but also businesses and local government that have all come on board the BearSmart bandwagon. The BearSmart team has taken an active role in working with the municipal government; the latest bylaws include a section on attractants and garbage. Team members also work alongside local emergency and first responders such as the fire department and RCMP. BearSmart volunteers were on-hand to help out following recent years' flooding and were able to identify and call in gas leaks and other potential issues.

Priority 3: Include the volunteers

The volunteers, not Clarke and not Pool, really form the core of the program. The program has integrated well with the community, not least because of the diversity of BearSmart's many volunteers. Students, retired military personnel, biologists, paramedics, stay-at-home mothers – all manner of people have signed up

BearSmart on the Doorstep: One key to the success of the Crowsnest Pass BearSmart Program is raising community awareness. Pictured here are Christy Pool (l) and Lisa Kinnear (r). PHOTO: © J. CLARKE

to volunteer.

A common thread among all the volunteers is the search for the opportunity to pursue passionately something they believe in. "It's why many of them moved to the Crowsnest Pass to begin with," explains Pool. "They wanted a peaceful, beautiful community to live in, and part of that is the wildlife aspect."

Passion is certainly necessary. A volunteer shift monitoring bear movements may run through the night, starting at 7:30 pm and not ending until 4 or 5 the following morning. After all, as Pool shrugs, "the animals make their own schedule."

But the volunteers' passion breeds a willingness to show up and repeat the shifts again and again. Pool once again credits the sense of ownership volunteers have in the program. BearSmart officers work with volunteers to ensure they can take part in every aspect of the job. Before even starting, volunteers undergo many hours of training: bear safety, proper monitoring, and talking to people about bears are all skills the volunteers learn. Then for their first season (running from April through November) volunteers are attached to a mentor – often another more experienced volunteer – to take them through the job. After a year of training, according to Pool, it's pretty clear who's actually committed to the program.

And there are many jobs to do – the monitoring and education aspects are key of course. But volunteers also teach courses and pick apples and cut down apple trees (with permission) to reduce attractants. They perform assessments for people who are unsure and want to know, for example, why bears are attracted to their yards. They offer school talks where they demonstrate how culvert traps work: when there's a bear in a culvert trap, volunteers come in to talk to students, to demonstrate what happens to a bear caught in them and why. This removes the students' curiosity about traps so they don't get caught in one themselves. "Lots of safety stuff," says Pool.

An evening of excitement

Last year was easily the busiest summer in the program's history. In 2014 there were 33 black bears in town and six grizzlies, all of which kept the volunteers going "24/7." Another Fish and Wildlife officer was brought in to support the program and the phones wouldn't stop ringing.

The weather was hot and dry last summer and, with their usual berry patches all dried up, the bears had to go somewhere to eat – that often ended up being inside the town limits.

One evening while Clarke was driving down the street his bear dog, Koda, alerted him to a bear in the vicinity. Clarke stopped the vehicle, opened the door and Koda quickly ran out, treeing a bear in a matter of seconds. After a radio call, a few other volunteers came by to help. As the volunteers were observing the treed bear, with officers making plans to sedate and process it, Koda suddenly ran off.

"It serves as a good reminder," recalls Pool, "that when there's one bear in the vicinity, always look for more."

Not 20 metres away, Koda quickly had a second bear up an adjacent tree. She was the only one who had noticed.

It wasn't long before the entire neighbourhood was out in the street, with the RCMP in attendance, looking at the two bears up in two trees in the same yard. Everyone, public and volunteers alike, had a really good learning experience and new volunteers "thought it was the coolest thing."

Program volunteers logged over 1,175 hours – 49 twenty-four hour days – during that busy season.

Busy or not, it's all been a satisfying experience for Clarke and Pool. It's especially gratifying to see how the community has come around.

Pool claims this has been one of the fundamental lessons learned from the experience: "When you include the community in a certain goal, and it's something being done as a whole, they feel like they have a full understanding of the program." The connection between programs and government is crucial. "Partnership is important."

Alberta Fish and Wildlife's Crowsnest Pass BearSmart Program consists of local certified volunteers that are used to assist in managing two species of bears within the Crowsnest Pass area.

Over several years community projects have been in place aiming at managing bear behaviour and coexistence between wildlife and humans. Goals of the program include:

- Reducing the number of bear mortalities,
- Reducing the amount of time spent on bear complaints,
- Reducing the number of bear relocations,
- Reducing the number of bear encounters with the public, and
- Identifying travel corridors used by the resident bear population.

BearSmart in the Field: One key to the success of the Crowsnest Pass BearSmart Program is the fieldwork of Koda, John Clarke's Karelian Bear Dog. PHOTO: © J. CLARKE

Between the lines:

What America's grizzly bear recovery expert said – and did not say – about Alberta's (ho-hum) attempts to recover the Great Bear

By Jim Pissot, *MSc, Director, WildCanada Conservation Alliance*

"It always takes a very long time."

Dr. Chris Servheen knows a thing or two about grizzly bear recovery. Or, maybe, 34 things (one for each year he has been working to recover the great bear in the US Northern Rockies). Servheen currently is the coordinator of the grizzly bear recovery strategy for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. At the centre of Servheen's three-decade experience is a clear conclusion. Managing humans is a lot more difficult than managing grizzly bears. And "managing" humans is what grizzly bear recovery is all about. He spoke to participants at the May 2014 Western Black Bear Workshop in Canmore about the US grizzly bear recovery strategy.

In 1975, US grizzlies were listed as "threatened" in the lower 48 states, where there were fewer than 700 bears and only 136 in Yellowstone National Park ("fewer than 700" … sound familiar?). The reasons for the listing included range reduction, habitat conflicts (due to livestock, logging, and road-building), illegal killing, and isolated population (sound familiar?). Recovery under Dr. Servheen's direction (guided by legal requirements and public consultation) emphasized reducing grizzly mortality (especially females), habitat security (particularly by closing "roads" and restricting motorized access), reducing conflicts (largely with ranchers and recreationists), and eliminating attractants (focusing on community garbage dumps).

But the multiple federal, state, and local agencies were unaccustomed to conservation cooperation and reluctant to partner with the US Fish and Wildlife Service until they all finally agreed to work together under the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. Plenty of time, effort and money were spent to understand and address the concerns of ranchers, farmers, communities, and others in and adjacent to the grizzly recovery area.

Servheen noted that preventing conflicts proved much more productive than dealing with them after the fact. So, working with ranchers and other landowners, the recovery team helped to remove livestock carcasses, provide electric fencing (for bee yards and other attractants), pen vulnerable livestock at appropriate times, and distribute roadkill and other carcasses in protected areas far from livestock operations.

Grizzly bear recovery is succeeding in the U.S. because four strong legs support the American institutional table. First, ongoing research provides needed **biological and contextual** data. Second, the popular visibility of grizzly recovery, and a reluctance to be tagged with failure, generated the necessary political will at and support from the very top of government agencies. Third, key departments, organizations, and individuals came to the table as a team. Finally, **public support** was cultivated through reliable information and consistent messaging from the recovery team,and – most importantly – the team's success in meeting the needs of people living in the region. According to Servheen, the failure of any single leg will cause the recovery table to collapse.

Without these legs Alberta's recovery table has collapsed. When Dr. Servheen spoke five years ago at the Society for Conservation Biology conference in Edmonton, he emphasized the need to restrict vehicles, close roads, and provide secure habitat for grizzlies. Implicit in his emphasis was the recognition that Alberta was failing even to come close. When questioned about Alberta's recovery efforts this year, Servheen praised the efforts of good provincial men and women in the field. Many of us in the audience noted that he acknowledged field efforts without commenting on the quality of leadership from Edmonton. There is no question that, to date at least, Alberta's grizzlies have not enjoyed support from ministers, MLAs or the office of the Premier. I hope that will change under Premier Notley and Minister Phillips.

But Dr. Servheen left us on a hopeful note. Grizzly recovery appeared close to hopeless when he began 34 years ago. Then institutional legs were built under the recovery table. Bears began to respond slowly to good management. The recovery team worked to reconcile human needs with grizzly recovery. Long-term, constantly steady, efforts began to pay off. Recovery always takes a very long time.

Meanwhile, here in Alberta, we have pushed for a very long time just to suspend the hunt and launch grizzly bear recovery. But we have good bear data, there is progress with willing ranchers in the foothills, and provincial BearSmart efforts are moving forward. So let's imagine where we'll be 34 years from the beginning of our own recovery plan. 2041 is not that far off. Grizzly bear recovery is possible. And, of course, it's worth it.

Former Senior Parks Canada Officials Speak Out Against Lake Louise Ski Area Expansion

If you blinked you missed it. The "it" here would be what Parks Canada likes to call its "public engagement" process regarding guidelines for the development and use of the Lake Louise Ski Area. Three weeks…that's how much time Canadians had to comment on the guidelines, guidelines developed, in private, by Parks Canada and Ski Lake Louise. Later in this issue you'll read Sean Nichols assessment of these guidelines. Below you can see what former senior officials from Parks Canada felt about these guidelines in an open letter they wrote to the federal environment minister…it's far from flattering.

- Ian Urquhart

Open letter to Canada's Minister of the Environment

June 19, 2015

Honourable Leona Aglukkaq
Minister of the Environment
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Re: Lake Louise Ski Area Guidelines for Development and Use

Dear Minister:

As former senior national park staff, we are writing to ask you to stand up for the ecological integrity of Banff National Park and reconsider the proposed massive expansion of the Lake Louise Ski Area. The scale and scope of the proposal are unprecedented in a national park and at odds with the park's purpose.

The current ski hill proposal doubles the already large, on-hill skier capacity and increases the developed area by over 30%. It doubles parking, doubles the number of ski lifts, builds new lodges, and constructs water reservoirs for snow making. It supports the cutting down of white-bark pine, a species at risk. Despite this, Parks Canada is calling this proposal a "significant environmental gain", an astonishing assertion contradicted by evidence. While there will be a reduction in the overall lease areas, these areas could not have been developed anyway merely because they were within the lease boundary. There is no real ecological gain and may be real ecological losses if fully implemented.

The current proposal is acknowledged by Parks Canada to be in violation of the Canada National Parks Act, because it would expand the already-large ski area into legally-designated wilderness areas outside the current lease. The proposal is to amend the Act to allow more development in a designated wilderness area inside Canada's premier national park. Banff is one of the oldest national parks in the world and a World Heritage Site, which Canada has pledged to the world to protect for its outstanding universal value. We wonder why the Parks Canada Agency charged with upholding and implementing the National Parks Act is championing a proposal to disregard it.

The rationale given in the national Ski Area Guidelines for considering a lease reduction to be something that can be considered a "net environmental gain" is that the lands released will be protected as designated Wilderness and protected from the risk of future development. The fact that these site guidelines propose to take land already protected as Wilderness, that were never part of the ski area lease, and allow a lift, warming hut and glading to take place puts the lie to that assurance. As such, approving these site guidelines would create a shocking precedent that undermines the logic behind the Ski Area Guidelines and essentially makes all Wilderness vulnerable in future. We consider this to be extremely bad policy and a betrayal of assurances given to the Canadian people when the Canada National Parks Act was amended to provide for designated Wilderness and, again, when the national Ski Area Guidelines were approved.

The science used in the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Lake Louise proposal is outdated and incomplete. Because of a reduction in the Park's science capacity, much of the information is old and the environmental assessment is not based on the collection of new site-specific information. We do already know that the existing ski hill development has significantly reduced the area's mountain goat population; this was documented in the 1983 final report of the park's Biophysical (Ecological) Land Classification. We do not know if the small remaining goat population can survive any new impact, and the site guidelines offer no thresholds or targets against which success or failure at restoring or maintain goat populations can be measured. We do know that the planting of the existing ski runs has created unique vegetation types that attract grizzly bears. We do not know what the impact of attracting bears to highly visited Lake Louise is on bear habituation and interactions with other areas in the park. Are Lake Louise bears the ones getting killed on the railway or becoming

involved in human-wildlife conflicts? We know that grizzly bears are normally active in daylight hours but, at the Lake Louise ski resort, choose to move into open areas only after summer use ends each day. Yet the site guidelines propose to extend summer operating hours further into the evening hours and establish no targets or thresholds for displacement of wary wildlife. There are many other issues not addressed in the strategic environmental assessment. For example, there is no mention in the assessment of the World Heritage values that need to be protected, nor of cumulative impacts of existing ski area developments.

The proposal supports large-scale development outside the existing lease, under licenses of occupation. Specifically the areas of the West Bowl and Hidden Bowl are Wilderness areas outside the ski area's lease. They are important wildlife areas, and as legally required, should not be developed for commercial skiing.

There are some excellent ideas in the ski hill proposal that can help manage some of the existing ecological problems in the Lake Louise area. The movement of the summer lodge higher up the mountain to avoid conflict between humans and bears is important for bears, although it might also reduce habitat quality for mountain goats. Similarly, ideas to strengthen the Whitehorn wildlife corridor are welcome. These are the ideas that a ski operation should strive for in a national park best practices that should already be required, not part of a "significant environmental gain." In any case, they are good ideas in an overall plan that is ecologically negative.

This proposal was developed in private between Ski Lake Louise and Parks Canada. We completely understand that it is in the commercial interest of Ski Lake Louise to ask for as much development as possible. We do not understand why Parks Canada would choose to become a proponent of this project without involving other stakeholders in the planning process - especially when some of the expansion proposals such as new development in Hidden Bowl will certainly reduce the quality of experience for existing users who travel from all around the world to experience undeveloped wilderness in the Skoki corridor. The scenic, noise, wildlife displacement and other impacts on quality visitor experiences would likely not have been discounted and placed secondary to the commercial interests of the leaseholder if representatives of other interest sectors had been involved in discussions earlier. The current process allows for a 3 week public comment period to comment on two major documents, the 86 page Lake Louise Ski Hill development Guidelines and the 170 page Strategic Environmental Assessment. These documents must be considered against the Banff Management Plan, the National Ski Areas Guidelines and Canada National Parks Act — both the letter of these laws and policies but also very much against their spirit and what they purport to offer all Canadians, not just ski resort patrons. Such a short comment period is not consistent with a desire for real public engagement, nor is it consistent with Parks Canada's once-acclaimed reputation for meaningful consultation. More significantly the planning approach used here consists of "decide, announce and defend" and is not in keeping with meaningful engagement on the globally significant public values of Banff.

So we ask that you set aside any further consideration of expansion of the ski resort beyond its current boundaries and suspend the seemingly inexorable approval of these ski hill guidelines. This suspension would allow for the opportunity for meaningful workshops with stakeholders and the public on what a good plan for the area would include. The current plan is simply an enormous ask from a private development interest, an assault on policy and legal protections that the people of Canada should be able to count on, and lacks perspective and balance.

We would be pleased to discuss this important matter with you, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Stephen Woodley, PhD Former Chief Ecosystem Scientist, Parks Canada

Kevin Van Tighem, Former Superintendent, Banff National Park, Parks Canada

Nikita Lopoukhine, Former Director General, National Parks, Parks Canada Former Chair, World Commission on Protected Areas, IUCN

Bruce Amos, Former Director General, National Parks, Parks Canada

Theirry Bouin, Former Field Unit Superintendent at Fundy and La Mauricie National Parks

Tom Kovacs, Former National Director, Natural Resources Conservation, Parks Canada

Raymond Alègre, Ex-Directeur, Gestion du Portefeuille des Investissements, Parc Canada

George Mercer, Former Jasper National Park Wildlife Specialist

Murray McComb, Former Chief of Planning Studies, Parks Canada

Gary Sealey, Former National Director Visitor Activities, Parks Canada

Bert Crossman, Former Chief Park Interpreter, Kouchibouguac National Park

Thinking Mountains:

An Interdisciplinary Initiative

By Niall Fink

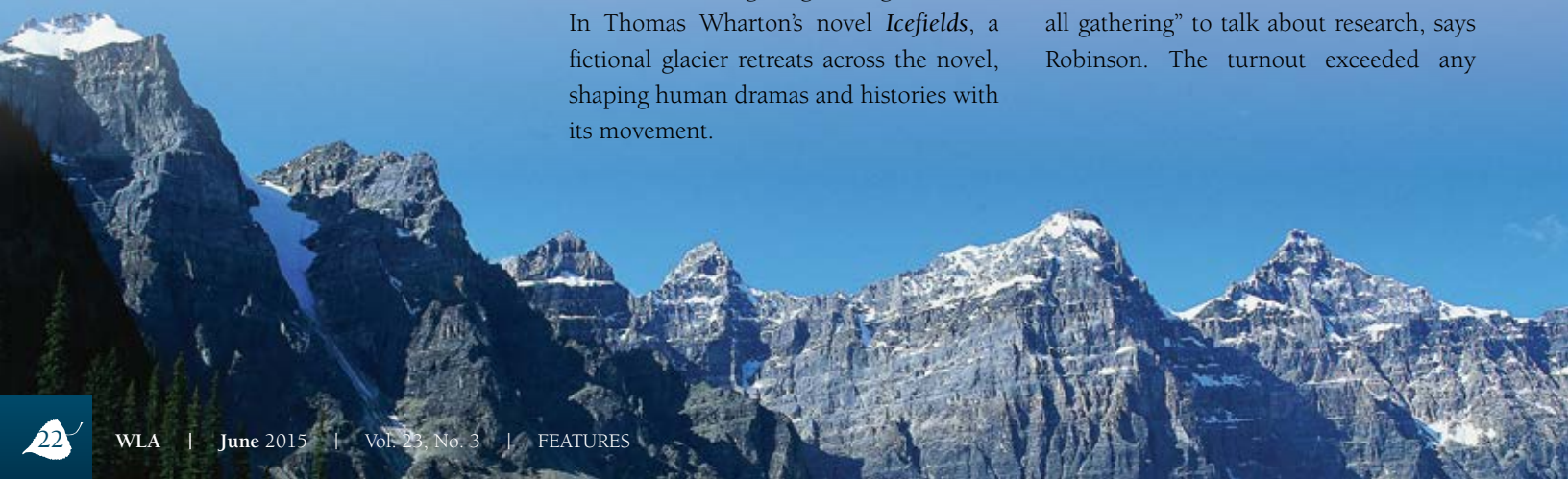
The evening of May 5th , while results poured in across the province and a new premier prepared her victory speech, one-hundred-and-twenty people from as far away as Tajikistan and New Zealand packed a conference room in Jasper and shut off their phones. They had gathered on Treaty 8 territory to think mountains. Elder Emil Moberly spoke the blessing, commencing the second "Thinking Mountains" conference. The moniker is inspired by Robert Bateman, who delivered the inaugural keynote at the first conference in 2012. Bateman explored what "thinking like a mountain" means in a future that would have been difficult for Aldo Leopold to conceive of when he coined the phrase in 1949. "Mountains are at the centre of many of the most pressing issues concerning the environment and sustainability," says Stephen Slemon, a professor of English and one of the conference's key organizers.

Spread over four days, ***Thinking Mountains*** 2015 featured more than one hundred presentations, workshops, and plenaries on subjects ranging from numerical modeling of glacial mass to the Bloomsbury aesthetic of George Mallory, the Everest hero who famously declined to explain his attraction to the mountain with an infinitely quotable answer: "Because it's there." No question got off quite so easily at the conference. Dozens of papers on class, masculinity, postcolonial politics, the history of science, and mountain aesthetics made a very compelling case that no mountain is ever just "there"—and, as many at the conference would be quick to point out, it is doubtful that Mallory even gave this answer anyway. Mountains are far from simple.

The range of perspectives was extraordinary. At a packed plenary on the second morning, glaciologist Jeffrey Kavanaugh painted an alarming picture of glacial retreat and rising sea levels in the coming century; an entire session was devoted to the projected and current impacts of retreating glaciers on ecosystems and human communities. Other presentations explored how citizen science created the discipline that gives us these models; still others, the emergence of a fascination with glaciers as more than just "remote oddities with little geological significance." In Thomas Wharton's novel ***Icefields***, a fictional glacier retreats across the novel, shaping human dramas and histories with its movement.

"Interdisciplinary collaboration enriches my own scholarship," explains ecology professor David Hik, who, like Slemon, was key in conceiving and developing the event. For two decades, Hik has helped bring "artists in residence" into his field camps in southern Yukon. One of these artists, Elena Johnson, released a book of poetry, ***Field Notes For the Arctic Tundra,*** with Gasperau Press this spring. "As an ecologist I am trained to see mountains in terms of biophysical processes," says Hik. "But I am not limited to that perspective. It is always enlightening to see how others see the same things and experience field research, through different lenses."

The Canadian Mountain Studies initiative, the organization behind ***Thinking Mountains***, was launched just five years ago. Slemon, Hik and mountaineering historian Zac Robinson had discovered that a surprising number of faculty members at the university were mountain specialists within their different fields. They gathered input, and eventually brought together an informal gathering of academics at the University of Alberta Faculty Club in the Fall of 2010. The meeting they organized that fall was a "casual, come-one-come-all gathering" to talk about research, says Robinson. The turnout exceeded any



expectations. "Everyone was excited to meet," Robinson says. "Everybody was actually keen to talk to each other, and in significant sorts of ways. We all realized that afternoon that, collectively, we had something special."

Interdisciplinary "mountain studies" programs exist at several US colleges but the Canadian Mountain Studies Initiative is the first of its kind in this country. In addition to connecting researchers, the Initiative aims to make "mountain studies" part of the University of Alberta's core curriculum.

A major step toward that vision was unveiled at ***Thinking Mountains*** this year. Mountain Studies 101 is a new Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) that provides an interdisciplinary introduction to the mountain world, drawing from environmental science, earth sciences, arts, and humanities. When finished, in 2016, the course will be available for credit at the University of Alberta. Its learning materials will also be available for free to anyone with an internet connection and an interest in mountains. Mountain Studies 101 will be the first course of its kind anywhere in the word.

"Our vision is that students at every level can come to the University of Alberta to study mountains from across the disciplines," says Slemon.

Niall Fink received his MA from the University of Alberta in June 2015. He is an all-around mountain enthusiast and writer.

Featured Artist Philip Kanwischer

Current

Taking a stand

Perched

Swoon

Anna Caddel… Winner of AWA's Calgary Youth Science Fair Award

Helen Jull presented Anna Caddel with AWA's "Wild Alberta" award at the 2015 Calgary Youth Science Fair for her project on how urban development affects wetlands. In a very thoughtful letter to AWA Anna wrote that this was her first science fair and her first award. Congratulations Anna!

Louise Guy Poetry Contest 2015 Winner

AWA is very pleased to announce that Ben Murray of Edmonton won the 2015 Louise Guy Poetry Contest. His poem is reprinted below and we hope you enjoy it as much as our judges' did.

Wilderness Pass

woodpeckers knock
and we enter
wilderness of firs

forget what's left
behind, nothing now
but breath of bear
sun's sigh
bark eternity

our tracks pace
yesterday's moose, we walk
its shaggy shadow

listen: quiet only woods
can make, our whispers
rustling leaves

your boondock smile
another shimmer of sun,
I share it
with the trees

backpack sweat
and stiffened limbs,
a day wandering
in wonder

under green canopy, under
eye of tonight's moon
we rest
upon pine needle beds

arms open, we embrace
a visible forest
of stars

By Ben Murray

AWA Kids' Camp Preview

By Brittany Verbeek, *AWA Conservation Specialist*

I'm sure many of you have heard of "nature-deficit disorder," a phrase coined by Richard Louv in his 2005 book ***Last Child in the Woods***. Over the years, AWA has hosted talks on the subject as well as written about it in *Wild Lands Advocate*. The term refers to people, especially children, spending less time outdoors. This disconnect from nature has resulted in many behavioural and health problems. Richard Louv provides evidence of the relationship between this disconnect and the rise of child obesity, increases in attention-deficit disorder, and increases in logged hours on household computers and televisions. To me, the good news about this kind of growing epidemic is there's a fairly simple solution that does not require medication or doctor visits.

Get kids outdoors and in nature!

Come hang out at AWA's Wilderness Defenders Kids Day Camp. The camp's vision is to foster the campers' appreciation for nature and to inspire youth into action towards helping protect our wild water, wild lands, and wildlife. Our goal is to ensure a safe, fun atmosphere while instilling a love of being active and outdoors. The learning comes naturally - as if through osmosis - in a fun, interactive, hands-on setting. It is also meant to encourage independent thought and intellectual curiosity while at the same time cultivating relationships and team cooperation.

We are about to launch our second annual kids camp this July and August. Last year's week-long pilot program was a tremendous success with eight wonderful campers. Every camper made amazingly knowledgeable presentations to their parents and AWA staff at the end of the week on a theme chosen and researched by them. The campers were one impressive group; they have continued to take their conservation messages to their schools and an occasional visit to the AWA office!

A large focus of this year's program will be on grassland ecosystem education through activities and hands on experiences. AWA campers will become little 'prairie fairies' learning about wildlife, wetlands, grasses, and how humans and grazers impact native grasslands. Camp activities will include craft making, special guests, outdoor activities, field trips, and wilderness projects. We have several returning campers as well as some brand new to the program. I'm excited to spend time and get to know them all, and will be sure to report back in a fall Wildlands Advocate issue with more photos and a summary of the two awesome weeks!

Another Tremendous Success:

AWA's 24th Annual Climb and Run For Wilderness

By Sean Nichols, *AWA Conservation Specialist*

A trumpet fanfare by local musician Chris Morrison and a few words from City of Calgary Councillor Gian-Carlo Carra and Dr. David Swann, candidate for Calgary Mountainview kicked off the 24th annual Climb and Run for Wilderness bright and early on a perfect spring day. The more than 1,200 participants included ten elite athletes from across the world competing in the Tower-running World Cup, babies in backpacks, Calgarians from all walks of life taking part a fun Saturday family event, as well as dignitaries including Vice-Consul Lee Wilbur from the U.S. Consulate General and long-time climb supporter Richard Guy, who turned 98 this year.

"The 24th climb and run for Wilderness has been without a doubt the most exciting and rewarding Earth Day Celebration we have had the honour to present. Our newest element, the power hour, was an outstanding success and we continue to spread this event's reach around the world," says AWA Executive Director Christyann Olson. "We could not realize this success without the Calgary Towers amazing staff and the more than 100 volunteers that bring a vibrancy that is Calgary."

For the past 24 years the Climb and Run for Wilderness has been celebrating Alberta's wild water, wild lands and wildlife. This year 1,000 people ascended the 802 stairs of the tower, raising awareness and money – $105,000 and counting – for the conservation of Alberta's wildlife, wild lands, and wild waters. Event supporters *West Direct Courier* and *The Carbon Farmer* have teamed up to plant a thousand trees in northern Alberta, one for every person who reached the top!

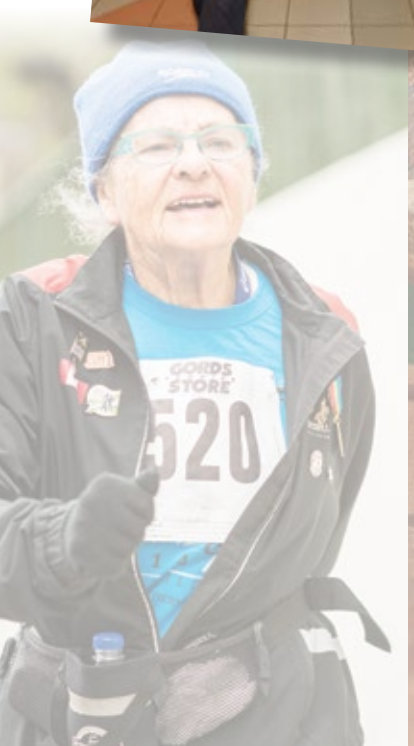
This year the AWA and the Calgary Tower were proud to celebrate the addition of an exciting new component to the event – the power hour! This elite event challenged competitors to see how many circuits of the tower (up the stairs and back down) they could complete in one hour. The Climb and Run for Wilderness power hour is the

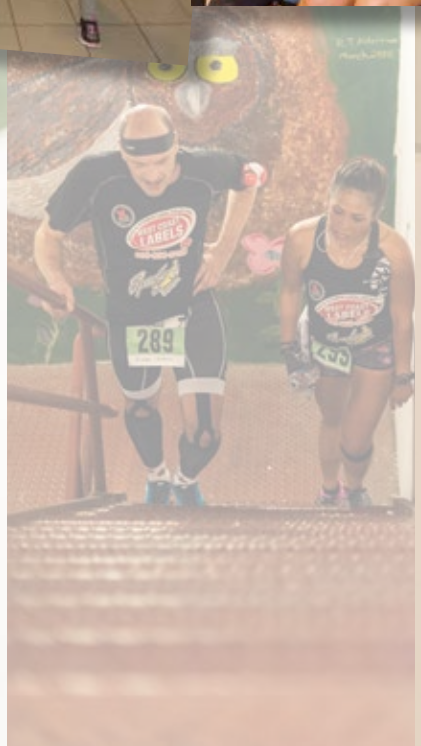
only event in Canada to be recognized as a Premium Event qualifying for the Tower-running World Cup, the worldwide acknowledged ranking for stair racers. The power hour attracted participants from across Canada, the United States and even Germany. Winners Görge Heimann (the #8 ranked tower runner worldwide) and Veronica Stocker each took home a first prize of $US 500.

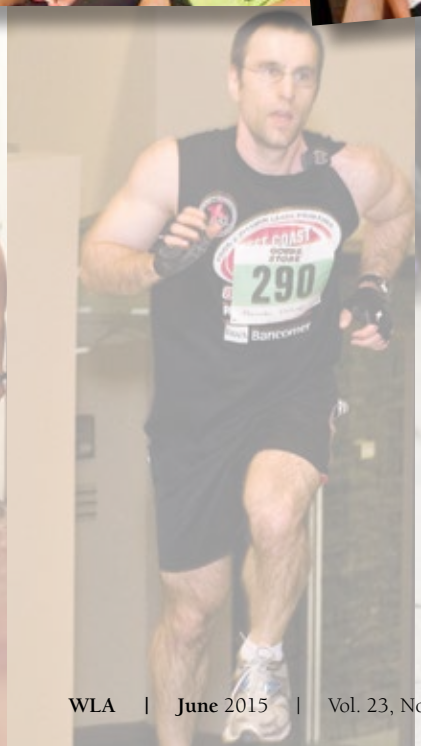
This elite component added an appealing new dimension to an event that is already long-established in Calgary, with the first Climb for Wilderness having been held on Earth Day in 1992. Since then the day has grown from a simple ascent of the tower to incorporate 5 athletic events including a 1km road race, a family-friendly "fun climb", a four-hour endurance climb, ***a team challenge***, and now the power hour. Teams in the team challenge ranged from corporate teams including teams from Suncor, Tetra Tech EBA, and four teams from Cenovus Energy, to family fun-climb teams such as "The Winded Whiners" and "The Young and the Breathless."

There was also an eco-fair – the ***Wild Alberta Expo*** – plenty of music, games and entertainment, and cultural aspects such as a poetry competition and a mural painting competition that have turned the stairway of the Calgary Tower into the "tallest art gallery in the west" with nature themed murals all the way up the tower's 802 stairs.

There were also more than more than 30 booths transforming the base of the tower into the wild and imaginative experience that is the Wild Alberta Expo, where everyone young and old was able learn about all the groups working hard to protect Alberta's wild spaces and wildlife.







Updates

Drones in Canada's National Parks

Look up! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's… surprisingly close to the ground and making a lot of noise!

There's no denying the recent surge in popularity of stunning videos and other forms of photography taken from Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, also known as "drones" or "quadcopters") as they swoop through the air on their flybys of cities and other landscapes.

But like with any technology, inappropriate or excessive use of UAVs may be harmful. Few studies have examined specifically the effects of drone noise on wildlife. However, the decibel levels of UAVs can be significant and comparable to levels that have been demonstrated to be harmful. This presents a serious problem especially when you consider that many drones could be used in a single area and they could fly close enough to wildlife to frighten them. We know that drones have disturbed herds of bighorn sheep in Zion National Park in Utah.

Part of the drone problem also stems from the diverse array of UAVs available on the market. Drones come in a wide variety of different models, all with different capabilities, flight modes, altitude potentials, and noise levels. There is currently no general regulation governing this emerging technology. According to Parks Canada, they currently consider UAVs to fall under regulations governing aircraft, which would be sufficient to prevent them from disrupting wildlife. While AWA hopes Parks Canada's opinion is on firm legal ground this approach may invite litigation.

With the exploding popularity of UAVs and UAV-based photography, AWA would like to see regulations enacted now to specifically address this technology and how it may be used.

UAV-based photography has great potential to showcase the beauty of parks and wilderness areas, when performed sparingly and responsibly. However it also could be very damaging to those same parks and wilderness if UAV use becomes a free-for-all.

In June 2014, the US National Park Service took the step of banning UAVs in national parks, save for their use under the auspices of a special use permit. AWA would like to see a similar step taken by Parks Canada.

- Sean Nichols

Proposed Lake Louise Ski Area Expansion: A shell game 34 years in the making granted you mere days to respond

After 34 years, Parks Canada released draft development guidelines for the Lake Louise Ski Area. It then gave you three weeks to comment on them. I'm writing this as if you still had time to participate in the public engagement process. I think this style underlines well just how insufficient and ill-considered the Parks Canada approach to this very significant development was.

Read through them and you may be tempted to see them as an impressive feat of "bait-and-switch." We've seen this story before, most notably with the Marmot Basin Ski Area in Jasper National Park. The proposed guidelines still may be viewed at *http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ab/banff/plan/gestion-management/lakelouise.aspx*

By swapping a number of wilderness areas in and out of leasehold territory, Parks Canada claims to have realized "environmental gains" that then are used to justify exempting the leaseholder from the Ski Area Management Guidelines. The result? It looks to me like significantly expanded activities and developed area.

Somehow a 30 percent increase to the skiable area and a 92 percent increase to the number of daily visitors count as an "environmental gain." Impressive.

Environmental gains?

The problem is that many of the claimed gains don't necessarily actually exist. They consist of undeveloped and largely untouched land being removed from the ski area's leasehold. This land would not have been subject to unfettered development; it still would have been subject to management by Parks Canada. For them to have been developed in any case would have implied questionable future actions on the part of Parks, ones that would run contrary to that agency's core mandate of maintaining ecological integrity.

Make no mistake about it. The land proposed for removal from the leasehold is indeed – as is claimed – ecologically valuable alpine habitat for sensitive species including grizzly bears, wolverines and mountain goats. But so too are the areas proposed for addition to the resort and developed as "skiable areas" (complete with at least one or two new ski lifts).

Parks Canada's approach to these development guidelines screams "entitlement." The entire document is based on the assumption that the ski area operator has a "right" to develop on the site. Of course they have no such thing, rather AWA reminds Parks Canada that the prerogative to develop should be properly regarded as a privilege conferred on the operator by virtue of being grandfathered into the park management plans.

What are the tradeoffs?

Parks Canada has to claim there are important environmental gains here. Without that claim there's absolutely no shred of support for the development guidelines. The agency writes: "The four substantial environmental gains ***make it possible*** to consider the following exceptions to the Site Guidelines." (my emphasis) Parks Canada's 2006 *Ski Area Management Guidelines*, the governing policy document for the management of ski areas in all mountain national parks, clearly dictates that exceptions to the guidelines can only be granted "if there are Substantial Environmental Gains."

The Lake Louise Ski Resort hopes to be granted several exceptions in return for those gains. They are:

- a 356 hectare expansion to the skiable area in the West and Hidden Bowls (these hectares lie outside the current lease and contain habitat arguably as valuable as what the leaseholder would relinquish)
- 111 hectares of added skiable area within

the current leasehold;
- expanded summer use;
- a new summer-use lodge;
- two new ski lifts;
- additional parking capacity (expanded from 1,176 spaces to 3,256 spaces); and
- a near doubling of the lift capacity (from 6,000 skiers per day to 11,500 skiers per day).

AWA has serious apprehensions about many of those proposals. We are always concerned about expanded summer use in any ski resort and, in this case, the vastly expanded year-round capacity is equally problematic. The proposed Hidden Bowl development is especially concerning; it is a wilderness area outside the sight lines of the current ski hill and should remain undeveloped.

It is particularly distressing that there are no specific mitigation measures required (beyond the development of a strategy that "addresses concerns") for the additional traffic along the resort access road. This road itself cuts through and disrupts sensitive wildlife habitat in the form of the Whitehorn Wildlife Corridor – the draft guidelines claim to protect this area. There is a contingency for "measures to manage visitor access and maintain vehicle disturbances at levels below 30 vehicles per hour" on the access road. However, this would only apply in the event the operator chooses to extend operations even further than those nominally delineated by the draft guidelines. These visitor/vehicle access measures should be required no matter what.

There are also plans to reconfigure the existing developments to bring summer use out of the lower elevations that are frequented by grizzly bears and to improve snowmaking processes to reduce water withdrawals from local watercourses during low-flow periods.

These are positive steps as far as they go, and AWA generally supports them. We believe all activities (not just summer use) should be moved to higher-elevation areas and likewise that water withdrawals should be reduced at all times of year, not just during low-flow periods. Water flows in the Pipestone River and Corral Creek provide important ecosystem function even during spring floods and other times of higher flow.

Call now – operators are standing by!

Okay, I should call this section "Don't Call Now – Operators Aren't Standing By Anymore." The procedural approach Parks Canada took was very, very wanting. If you'd been able to read this before the deadline came and went here's what I would have said…

Also an egregious procedural problem with the draft guidelines is the consultation process. A long-range plan for the ski area was released in 1981, with an expectation that permanent development guidelines would soon follow. They didn't.

So we've been waiting 34 years for some action on developing guidelines. Now they are suddenly released – without any warning or advance notice – and the public has a mere three weeks to read and digest the 89-page document and to respond. After a 34 year hiatus the public gets a measly three-week consultation period. By the way, three weeks is the absolute minimum required period according to Parks Canada policy. Then there are the open houses. There are three of them. They meet for seven and one-half hours in total. If you don't live in or can't travel to Calgary, Banff, or Lake Louise you're out of luck.

Frankly, this is insulting. It gives a strong impression that the entire plan is a fait-accompli waiting to receive the rubber-stamp of approval. We do not see any rational ecological need for this sudden rush to bring this into existence after decades of waiting,and are arguing for a more lengthy consultation period. For goodness sake, give the public ample time to consider the guidelines. In the meantime, AWA will be submitting our response, including those concerns outlined above.

In the absence of any revision to the consultation period, feedback will be accepted until midnight on June 21. AWA encourages the public to voice their concerns during this short window of opportunity.

- Sean Nichols

AWA's Runners for Wilderness Turn in Strong Finish at Calgary Marathon

Sporting distinctive bright yellow shirts, the ten members of AWA's *Runner's for Wilderness* team crossed the finish line in style at the 51st Calgary Marathon on May 31. Composed of AWA board members, staff, members, family, and friends, the team got together on that warm spring morning to show some spirit, get some exercise, and raise money for Alberta's wilderness.

Raise money they did: collectively the team raised over $5,000 through fundraising efforts, with proceeds going to AWA. A fabulous incentive prize, donated by team member Kevin Van Tighem, helped the fundraising along. Anyone who donated $50 or more had their name entered into a draw for a stay at Kevin's wilderness cabin along with a hike into the magnificent Bob Creek Wildland. Out of the 47 qualifying donors, Leanne Willoughby of Benalto was the lucky winner!

Along with Kevin, the various team members ran a collective 269km, competing in four different events including the 10k run, marathon, ultra marathon, and the kids' marathon. The latter was contested by two team members, Michael and Annika Pugh, with Annika being the youngest member of the AWA team at 5 years of age.

Congratulations to Annika, Kevin, and all the team members and a special thanks to all the donors who raised funds to help protect Alberta's wild lands, wild waters and wildlife.

- Sean Nichols

Runners for Wilderness Team Members
PHOTO: © C. OLSON

Reader's Corner

Robert Boschman and Mario Trono (ed.), *Found in Alberta: Environmental Themes for the Anthropocene* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014).

Reviewed by Dr. Herb Kariel

Dr. Herb Kariel, retired Professor of Geography, University of Calgary, and AWA Board Member Emeritus

This is an informative, important, and timely book. Its sixteen chapters (plus introduction) are organized into six parts: Found in Alberta, Bituminous Sands, Policy and Legal Perspectives, Wilderness, and Shared Horizons. Let me start out by saying this book of essays resulted from a conference held at Mount Royal University in 2010. It generally focuses on people's impact on and relationship with the environment. The context is Alberta and the focus is the current geological age – the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is the age where human activities constitute the dominant influence on our environment. It's impossible to do justice to the substance of these essays in this review but I will try to give you a very small taste of what you'll find when you pick up this collection by briefly commenting on some, not all, of the contributions. I'm sorry this brief review does not cover more of this book's worthy chapters.

The Introduction "Alberta and the Anthropocene" offers brief synopses of the essays that follow it. It also deals with greenhouse gas levels and the fact they have risen to far above their pre-industrialization levels. The proof of this rests in the records from bygone atmospheres preserved in sea ice. The Anthropocene also has produced an increased rate of extinction of animals and plants. For example: as carbon dioxide from the atmosphere has dissolved into the oceans the acidity of those waters has increased. The global coral reef system likely cannot be saved - a very sad reality. Crucially, market forces, increased population growth, and technological change have accelerated the Anthropocene. The editors, Robert Boschman and Mario Trono, assert here that questions of economic and environmental justice are intricately connected to our answerability for degrading the environment. Environmental stewardship, and environmental justice, would be relatively simple if individual communities, industries and nations were amenable to changing their plan trajectories through ecological space and time where new scientific findings suggest a different more sustainable way. But a commitment to industrialization and commercial growth will deny that possible future.

They echo what has become a common observation of the federal Conservatives' style of governing. Prime Minister Harper has prevented the free-flow of scientific knowledge from reaching the public since it may interfere with that commitment to economic growth. The problem there is that this commitment's view of the future is restricted to futures markets, not to ecological futures. This introduction and the remainder of the collection insist this orientation must change.

Lorelei Hanson opens the Found in Alberta section with an essay on land trusts. It explores the social human-nature interaction enabled and promoted by the private property ethic central to land trusts. They are non-profit organizations and a new form of privatized conservation that may protect conservation values on private land through fee simple purchase, property management, and the acquisition of partial rights or interests in the land through mechanisms such as conservation easements. Land trusts have existed for many years but have grown with the enthusiasm for neo-liberal, market-driven "solutions" to problems. There are currently 170 organizations involved in private land conservation. The Federal government's Ecological Gifts Program, launched in 1995, enables people to receive tax credits for donating outright title or an interest in properties. It's regarded as key to the rapid expansion of this type of conservation mechanism. The principle behind these trusts is that individuals can use private property in ways that are economically and ecologically profitable. These land trust organizations in Alberta vary in size and their ability to manage the land and acquire new land. They also vary according to their transparency and their ability to respond to local communities.

Robert Boschman's article on *E. coli* is sparked by very personal, nearly tragic circumstances. His young daughters were infected and could have died from *E. coli*. Not all forms of *E. coli* are toxic. But a strain such as *E. coli* O157:H7 is exceedingly toxic to humans. Boschman uses his traumatic family experience (thankfully his girls recovered completely from their infection) to highlight just how fictional the nature-culture dichotomy has become. The threat posed by this "natural" toxin is very much exacerbated by some of the practices in the beef industry. This is a position the industry in the U.S. has fought against. It argues that the toxin is natural and therefore consumers just need to cook their beef properly. Our activities, our cultures, nurture some aspects of the natural world and cripple or destroy others.

The oil sands figure significantly and not surprisingly in this collection. Geo Takach opens the Bituminous Sands section with an essay examining the video battle between government/industry, on the one hand, and independent filmmakers/activists, on the other. The bituminous sands or in politically correct terms- the oil sands – provide a significant share of Alberta's budget revenues (19 percent in the 2012-13 budget). Optimists suggest the bitumen royalty will deliver huge amounts of money for the Alberta government in the future. Exploiting the sands also requires excavating, two tons of earth and using six to eight barrels of water in order to produce one barrel of synthetic crude oil. None of the water is returnable to the water shed. Refining the crude generates about three times more greenhouse gases per barrel than conventional oil refining and each day oil sands operations burn enough natural gas to heat six million homes. Alberta's environmental reputation, and by extension Canada's, is under siege and the international public relations battle of images is escalating.

Takach uses the idea of place branding in his article. This involves presenting a favourable shorthand image of a place and what one actor or another wants it to be known for. It's an age-old idea that some might simply call propaganda. It's becoming increasingly central to the global economy, networked as it is, in which jurisdictions compete aggressively for a limited pool of people, and investment/tourism dollars. In Takach's study place branding is a duel between ideas of how Alberta should be perceived. Economic and environmental images clash with respect to the tar sands. In 2008 the provincial government launched a three-year, $25 million dollar campaign to rebrand for the province. The core image was of a place

where people have the "freedom to create, spirit to achieve." This was intended to counter the perception of Alberta as a producer of dirty oil that activists and independent filmmakers conveyed.

T.R. Kover's essay asks the question: Are the oil sands sublime? Do they conjure that mixture of disturbing and alluring essential to the sublime? Kover is unsettled by the prospect that Edward Burtynsky's photographs of the oil sands could constitute the sublime. They may lead us to apathy, to evading responsibility for the environmental destruction of exploiting the oil sands. Surely the feelings one might take from Burtynsky's photographs would be much different than our reaction if we were in the position to witness the smashing of the boreal face-to-face.

"Fostering Environmental Citizenship," by Lysack, Thibault, and Powell, traces the history of "Alberta Acts on Climate Change," one project designed to encourage and foster a greater sense of environmental citizenship in Alberta. By environmental citizenship the authors mean "a sense of belonging to a larger community." As the project team developed their efforts to engage citizens on the subject of climate change they realized how important problem solving and capacity building were at the local level. People wanted information about what they could do to reduce their carbon footprints. This led to increased attention to how to shift Alberta's energy use habits in more renewable directions and revitalize rural communities.

The last essay to be considered here is Shaun Fluker's contribution to the section entitled Wilderness. In "Defending the Wild" Fluker examines how wilderness advocates, be they individuals such as his client Mike Judd or organizations like AWA, use the legal system to pursue their interests. The record is discouraging. Wilderness advocates have won few substantive victories and have been most successful in securing procedural outcomes – forcing an environmental assessment or disclosing access to information. Fluker wonders if the reluctance of the law to preserve wilderness might not be rooted in the combination of government indifference to wilderness and framing wilderness as public policy. This combination gives indifferent officials tighter control over what matters so much to advocates such as AWA. He invites us to reconsider the normative, the "should be," dimension of the law and how it has helped to define our relationship to wild spaces and species.

This invitation sits at the ideational centre of thjs collection. It is part of the book's broader and important call for Albertans to rethink their place in nature.

Summer Events

Backpack Trip: Bighorn Trip and Trail Monitoring (1)
Tuesday July 14, 2015 – Friday July 17, 2015

Join AWA on a multi-day volunteering / backpacking trip to the Bighorn Wildland and be a part of the trail monitoring work we are undertaking as part of our Bighorn Wildland Recreational Monitoring Project! The area we will be going to is near the Ram Falls Provincial Park in the Upper Clearwater / Ram PLUZ of the Bighorn Wildland. This will be a 4 day / 3 night trip (depending on weather, on how fast we go, on how much monitoring work there is, etc.) and involve ~35km of mostly easy walking including many creek crossings; there are optional more challenging side hikes if people are up to it. It will involve a volunteer component that will include visual monitoring and recording, photographing, and measuring of conditions with timestamp / GPS, etc. Training is provided for all of the volunteer tasks.

Difficulty rating: Moderate (not steep but long)
Cost: $50
Pre-registration required: (403) 283-2025
Online: www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes

Backpack Trip: Bighorn Trip and Trail Monitoring (1)
Backpack Trip: Bighorn Trip and Trail Monitoring (2)
Friday August 14, 2015 – Sunday August 16, 2015

Join AWA on a multi-day volunteering / backpacking trip to the Bighorn Wildland and be a part of the trail monitoring work we are undertaking as part of our Bighorn Wildland Recreational Monitoring Project! The area we will be going to is near the Ram Falls Provincial Park in the Upper Clearwater / Ram PLUZ of the Bighorn Wildland. This will be a 3 day / 2 night trip (depending on weather, on how fast we go, on how much monitoring work there is, etc.) and involve ~35km of mostly easy walking including many creek crossings; there are optional more challenging side hikes if people are up to it. It will involve a volunteer component that will include visual monitoring and recording, photographing, and measuring of conditions with timestamp / GPS, etc. Training is provided for all of the volunteer tasks.

Difficulty rating: Moderate (not steep but long)
Cost: $50
Pre-registration required: (403) 283-2025
Online: www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes

Hike: Hand Hills with Tim Schowalter
Sunday July 26, 2015

Join Tim Schowalter on a wander about this knob and kettle landscape, one of the few remaining northern fescue intact grasslands in Alberta. Its unique plants and animals will make for a lovely day of observing and learning.

Difficulty rating: Moderate
Cost: $20 AWA members, $25 non-members
Pre-registration required: (403) 283-2025
Online: www.GoWildAlberta.ca/hikes

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

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