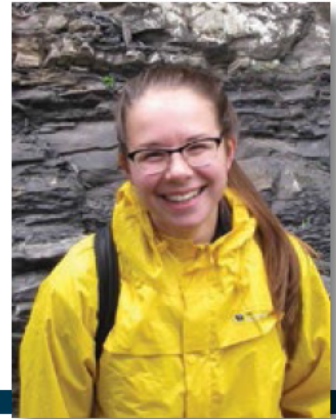


Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow Campaign



By Joanna Skrajny, AWA Conservation Specialist

The Eastern Slopes are in a state of disrepair. For too long, the Alberta Government's policy has been "open unless closed" when it comes to access and use of our Eastern Slopes. Poor cumulative effects management has led to excessive linear disturbances in our mountains and foothills. These human-caused linear disturbances include industrial development, clearcuts, power lines, cut lines, off highway vehicle (OHV) trails, recreational trails, seismic lines, and roads.

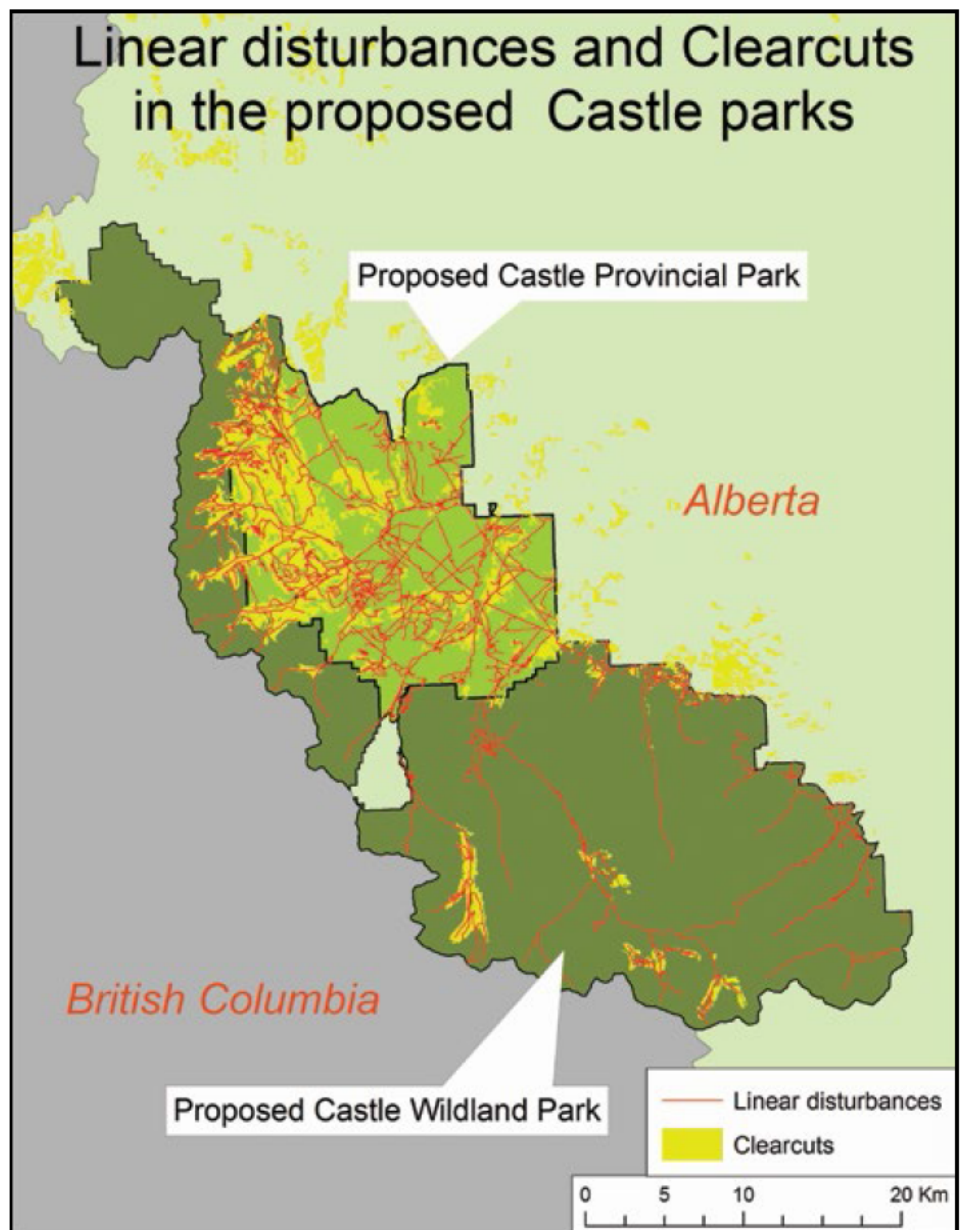
Why is linear disturbance an issue?

Even when individual impacts and disturbances may not be significant, the overall impact of all of the physical disturbances on the landscape has widespread and damaging impacts. Especially concerning is motorized recreation, which often takes advantage of this linear disturbance network. With motorized recreation in place, native plants are not protected from invasive species, native fish populations are not protected from watercourse disruption, and native terrestrial populations are not protected from habitat fragmentation.

This is no clearer than when we examine the status of wildlife in Alberta's mountains and foothills. Westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, all listed as "threatened" under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*, as well as mountain whitefish and arctic grayling have all suffered major population declines due to decades of inaction and excessive linear disturbance on the landscape. Other species at risk in the

Eastern Slopes include grizzly bear and woodland caribou. Although OHV use is widespread throughout Alberta, only six

percent of the population participates in motorized recreation. This is in direct contrast to the majority of Albertans that



The current linear disturbances within the proposed Castle parks already far exceed any scientifically established threshold for protection of fish and wildlife. Closure and subsequent restoration of these disturbances is urgently required. MAP CREDIT: P. LEE 2015.



Before and 10 minutes after: Gold Creek, a tributary to the Crowsnest River, contains multiple OHV crossings and is heavily loaded with silt and mud following a rain event as runoff enters from surrounding OHV trails. OHV use results in increased soil compaction, proliferation of invasive species, increased habitat fragmentation, and increased runoff of sediment into streams which negatively impacts water quality and fish habitat. PHOTO CREDIT: L. FITCH

depend on the Eastern Slopes for their drinking water.

On December 4, 2015, a group of scientists and conservationists met in Calgary to discuss the future of our Eastern Slopes. A resulting communiqué was produced outlining the actions that are required to restore conservation and watershed protection as the top priority for Alberta's Eastern Slopes. These include.

- Ban OHVs from protected areas in Alberta's Eastern Slopes, including the new Castle Parks, and from areas identified by the province as *Prime Protection* and *Critical Wildlife Zones*. OHVs are a land-use which is incompatible with the

purpose of Provincial Parks.

- Permanently close and decommission trails in Threatened westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat, the destruction of which is illegal under the recently issued Critical Habitat Order.
- Reduce the existing road and motorized trail density in Alberta's Eastern Slopes to scientifically defensible levels.

The communiqué was sent to the Government of Alberta on January 13, 2016. The greater public in Alberta has been increasingly frustrated by the failure of past governments to exercise oversight and sustainable management of our public lands. We are long overdue for decisive

actions which prioritize Albertans' health and well-being, and properly value intact and healthy landscapes. 🌲

If you would like to sign onto the communiqué, please write to jskrajny@abwild.ca with the following information:

- Name, Title (if applicable), Place of Residence
- Name of Organization you are representing (if applicable)