

rangeland, and inevitably, it seems to me, that's going to lead to degeneration in the natural condition of this special area.

So unless I hear information otherwise from the sponsoring minister – it's none other than the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek – I think we'll have to oppose this piece of legislation. I mean, it's well known that off-highway vehicle activity has a detrimental impact by and large on wildlife habitat. We're probably all familiar with the kind of disturbance and damage that's done to the soil and to creek beds where these roads cross creeks. It certainly is noisy. It disturbs wildlife, increases air pollution, and can cause, in fact, significant soil erosion. I saw some photos from last fall of soil erosion in an area north of the area we're discussing right now resulting from off-highway vehicle use, and it was actually quite dramatic and quite disturbing.

Now, I suppose that if there were some absolutely overwhelming justification for this, I'd consider it, but I think that in some ways we not only need to think locally and act locally; we need to think globally as well here. We are in a world in which wilderness is being eliminated. Wilderness is being lost around the planet. In fact, there are some people who have put forward pretty powerful arguments that nature as it has been known throughout the entire existence of humanity has now ended. The whole idea of genuine nature is no longer a reality. It is simply a historical idea, meaning that there is no part of this planet any more that is untouched or unaffected by human activity and that indeed we have gone from allowing natural processes to shape the course of the earth's health to having that overwhelmed by human activity.

So the whole idea from a global perspective that wilderness is rapidly diminishing has to be considered here. We in this country, this incredible country of ours, Canada, and this wonderful province of ours, Alberta, still have corners of this land that are about as wild as any you are going to find in the world. We ought to be stewarding that land; we ought to be protecting it; we ought to be thinking of generations ahead and the value that untarnished natural land will have in perpetuity. I'm afraid this bill doesn't respect that idea. This bill threatens yet more wilderness in Alberta and is something that I think our children and grandchildren will look back at and say: wasn't that too bad; we lost that gorgeous piece of nature.

So I do look forward to the comments from the minister, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to see how he justifies this bill, see how he explains it to us, and how he can attempt to convince us that opening up yet another little corner of Alberta's nature to quads and motorized vehicles is a good idea, because I don't believe it is.

I don't want to consume any more time than is necessary here, Mr. Chairman, but unless I hear something quite remarkably convincing from the minister, I'm going to be opposing this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've continued to follow this debate in *Hansard* and while I'm able to be in the House, and there was something that the Member for Highwood had brought up that sort of caught my attention last time when he was talking about the lack of snow in the area. Therefore, my discussion about whether it was appropriate for snowmobilers or not was somewhat of a moot point because there wasn't any snow, and I thought: okay. I went looking for a better description for my own purposes of where this area was and what it was like and didn't have to look too hard because we're getting very good in Alberta on having information available on web sites.

This is from an Alberta government web site. It's on the special places, called Alberta's Commitment, from page 31, and I'm just going to read this description because it quite struck me and, I think,

was the deciding factor in my decision not to support this bill. So, if I may, it just says that

one of the most noteworthy accomplishments of Special Places is the designation of over 30,000 hectares in an area known as the Whaleback. The largest undisturbed montane landscape in Alberta is now preserved in Bob Creek Wildland and Black Creek Heritage Rangeland. A series of spine-like ridges, the landscape of the Whaleback alternates between open grasslands and forests of pine, spruce, fir and aspen. Limber pine over 575 years old and 400-year old Douglas fir have been recorded. The snow free, Chinook-swept grasslands are winter range for mule deer and Alberta's largest elk herd while the list of predators includes cougar, wolf and grizzly bear.

Then it goes on to talk about there being over 80 species of birds there, that "many rare plants have been recorded," and of great interest is that

with the co-operation of industry, the Whaleback is permanently preserved free of mining, oil and gas development and logging. Forestry tenures were relinquished and oil and gas rights donated to the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Grazing lessees also supported inclusion of their leases in the protected areas.

So there's been a lot of work, a lot of meeting of the minds, from sectors that may traditionally be seen to be in opposition to one another, and I was quite struck by that.

Given that it is a very special place in Alberta – and I listened carefully to what the minister brought forward as rebuttal to the concerns that have been raised – I'm not satisfied by his points that this is reason enough to step away from our previous commitment to protect this area. I'm aware that my colleague the Official Opposition critic on the environment and on parks and forestry and sustainable resource management has also spoken at length raising her concerns around this. We have had a feedback loop in the community, both the interested constituency of environmental enthusiasts but also from the area. We always seek out what their opinion is on anything, and we've not had a very positive response coming from there.

Given all of that in context, I'm not willing to support this bill. I even looked at whether it was possible to amend the bill to make it more palatable, and I don't see opportunity for amending without, you know, totally scratching the bill, which is going against the whole point of an amendment.

So at this point I'm not willing to support the bill. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

9:20

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 3

Architects Amendment Act, 2004

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a few brief comments in support of the bill and to summarize it a bit.

Bill 3, the Architects Amendment Act, 2004, is a measure that strengthens the professional standards for the architectural and