

2016-2017 Annual Report

Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action for 52 years



Alberta Wilderness Association

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2016 - 2017



AWA is People Inspired to Care

Volunteers Vivian Pharis, Joanna Skrajny, Norma Ruecker, Sean Nichols, Nick Pink, Joel Van Riper and Heinz Unger assisted by faithful horses, spent a week in the wilderness repairing a segment of the Bighorn Historic Trail - September 2017

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Contributions to the Annual Report are provided by
AWA board and staff members with thanks to
Carolyn Campbell, Nick Pink, Joanna Skrajny, Sean Nichols,
Vivian Pharis, Cliff Wallis and Chris Saunders

COVER PHOTO – SANDY POINT, SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER— CHRISTYANN OLSON

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AWA's Staff

Ian Urquhart, Diane Mihalcheon, Joanna Skrajny, Nick Pink, Carolyn Campbell, Christyann Olson

WILDERNESS FOR TOMORROW



From AWA's humble beginnings to the strong force it is today, we are about people. The Association has grown and is respected as a valued colleague and group of conservationists, not only in Alberta but throughout the country and indeed the continent.

Our annual report is an archive of some of the work we have attempted this past fiscal year. Attempted and in many cases achieved. We are pleased and proud of our successes, discouraged by some of our struggles, and energized by so many caring and inspired individuals and communities.

We are constantly learning. Recognizing that, when we are faced with the same issues, rather than being discouraged, we can acquire new skills, more current and easily communicated messages, knowledge based in solid science and on the ground experience to help us be steadfast in our quest for better conservation and more communities inspired to care.

For me in this 18th year as Executive Director, I see there has been a great deal of change through the years, a great deal of passion, a great deal of support. AWA has always had a great deal of integrity and perhaps most admirably or even most importantly it is nimble, when we need to change or do something differently, no matter how tough the challenge, we do it.

Please know that the difficult economic times, experienced by many, have had an impact on AWA as well. We are frugal and invest your financial support as carefully as we can. At the very bottom of everything, the base of our success is the support you send us, in heartfelt notes of encouragement and in dollars, so we can have some of the very brightest and most respected staff in the conservation movement and we can and do make a difference to the wilderness legacy we all want.

Thank you!

Christyann Olson,
Executive Director,
November 21, 2017

WHO WE ARE

There are many challenges for AWA across the Alberta conservation spectrum including these few I'll highlight here:

- Castle parks - AWA must continue to press the GoA for a management plan which provides true provincial park status. The plan must eliminate off-highway vehicle use in the parks.
- Caribou - AWA must continue to alert Albertans to the need for an effective recovery plan for caribou in Alberta. The GoA made a commitment to the federal government, 5 years ago, to provide a plan by October 2017 and has not yet done so. This is a critical first step to prevent the extirpation of caribou in Alberta, and
- Public lands - AWA must continue its efforts to educate and inform Albertans about the huge potential conservation value of public lands and the lack of transparency over their management.



If AWA is to meet its objectives and be successful with these and many other priorities its board of directors will have to play a significant part. The role of the board, in very general terms, is to set goals for the organization and to develop, with the Executive Director, operating strategies to allow AWA to achieve those goals, and to hold the Executive Director and her team accountable for the implementation of those strategies. The board will also provide guidance and assistance along the way.

The current board is well qualified to do this. We have people with extensive expertise in: biology and environmental science, environmental activism, fundraising, environmental law, litigation, accounting, and the art of communicating with the broad public. Many board members have experience in the governance and operation of other non-profit entities which is also very valuable to AWA. Of course, all of the board have a passion for protecting Alberta's wilderness. I believe the board is very effective in carrying out its duties.

In addition to their formal roles as a director, all of the members of the board provide substantial support to AWA by volunteering their skills and energy in numerous ways. This work has, over the years, been critical to AWA's success and will continue to be in the future.

During the year Kirsten Pugh resigned from the board after two years of service. In prior years, and during her time as a director, Kirsten has been a tremendous supporter of the Climb for Wilderness and she was instrumental in reinvigorating the event in 2017. We thank her sincerely for her efforts and look forward to continuing to work with her in future years.

We continue to look to improve the mix of characteristics and skills in the AWA board and will add to our diversity and strength this year with the nomination of AWA volunteer and supporter Jamie Jack.

In closing I would like to thank Christyann Olson and her excellent team for another very strong year. This report contains a detailed account of their progress on the numerous issues where AWA is seeking to make a real difference. Today AWA stands well positioned to achieve further protection of Alberta's wild places and wildlife.

Owen McGoldrick
President
November 21, 2017

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President:	Owen McGoldrick, Calgary
First Vice-President:	Jim Campbell, Calgary
Second Vice-President:	Richard Secord, Edmonton
Secretary/Treasurer:	Cliff Wallis, Calgary
Directors:	Clint Docken, Bragg Creek Chris Saunders, Calgary Frank Calder, Edmonton Gail Docken, Edmonton Kirsten Pugh, Calgary (<i>resigned November 2016</i>) Joe Vipond, Calgary
Director Emeritus:	Herbert G. Kariel (<i>Herb passed away September 16, 2017</i>) Vivian Pharis, Cochrane

AWA's board of directors is composed of dedicated volunteers with specific attributes and skill sets that support the needs of the organization and the staff. Elections for the board are held annually at the Annual General Meeting.

STAFF

Executive Director:	Christyann Olson, BN, MSc
Conservation Specialists:	Carolyn Campbell, BA, BEd, MA, MBA Joanna Skrajny, BSc Andrea Johancsik, BSc (<i>resigned April 30, 2017</i>) Nick Pink, BSc (<i>hired October 2016</i>)
Wild Lands Advocate Editor & Conservation Staff:	Ian Urquhart, PhD (<i>additional conservation staff hours commenced January 2017</i>)
Administrative Associate:	Diane Mihalcheon

A hallmark of AWA's strength is its ability to adapt, reorganize, and be relevant in times of change. AWA has an excellent staff, complemented by individuals on its board of directors who volunteer and provide tremendous support to the research, advocacy, and outreach work that is required throughout the province. Core staffing was supported by casual and contract staff throughout the year to assist with specific projects and outreach. Ian Urquhart began taking on some specific files as a part time conservation staff member.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES, OBJECTIVES

Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action

For more than 50 years, AWA has spoken in defence of those who have no voice: wild lands, wildlife, and wild waters throughout Alberta. From grassroots beginnings in the kitchens of backcountry enthusiasts, ranchers, and outfitters, we have grown into an independent province-wide conservation organization, well-recognized for our tenacity, integrity, and longevity. When necessary, we are uncompromisingly outspoken and willing to engage politically on provincial conservation issues. Our work spans the entire province, and we represent a wide diversity of more than 7,000 members and supporters throughout 214 Alberta communities and around the world who care about protecting the province's wild places. Membership growth has stabilized and we hope to realize new targets for the coming fiscal year.

AWA is a non-profit, federally registered, charitable society with a provincial office in Calgary, which houses our Wilderness Resource Centre, the province's most comprehensive archive and growing collection on conservation in Alberta.

VISION

Protected Wilderness

There will be a comprehensive system of protected wild areas.

Decision-making Society

There will be a society with decision-making processes, policies, and laws that recognize the value of nature for its own sake.

Effective and Credible Advocates

AWA will be an effective and credible advocate that fosters awareness and helps Albertans protect wild areas and wildlife.

Independent

AWA will have sufficient resources to speak independently on wilderness issues.

VALUES

Ecocentredness

We recognize the inherent importance of nature and humankind's place in it, and the role of AWA is to be an advocate for that which cannot speak for itself.

Integrity

We conduct our advocacy with truth, honesty, and respect for others, and within the full limits of the law.

Respectfulness

We develop rapport with individuals and communities through active listening, openness, and free access to information in a democratic way.

Participation

We promote effective environmental decision making through an empowered and knowledgeable public that is inclusive of all segments of society.

Tenacity

We will steadfastly advocate for nature in a manner true to our principles through innovation, persistence, and passion.

Passion

We are free to feel, demonstrate, and encourage an emotional and spiritual connectedness with nature.

OBJECTIVES

To promote the protection of wildland areas, wildlife, and wild rivers in Alberta and to preserve them in their natural state.

To safeguard and restore the wild, natural ecosystems of Alberta.

To enable Albertans to communicate effectively with government, industry, and other sectors of society on matters concerning the wild, natural ecosystems of Alberta.

To educate Albertans on the value, ecologically sustainable use, and conservation of wilderness and of natural lands, water, and wildlife.

To foster among Albertans a sense of connectedness to and passion for wild places, wildlife, and Alberta's natural landscapes.



One of several hikes AWA sponsored this summer helping members and supporters learn about Alberta's landscapes and wildlife. The valuable grasslands ecosystem and the need for protection for the Milk River Ridge, were the focus of this July 2017 day hike - Christyann Olson

WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH

"Wilderness exists where large areas are characterized by the dominance of natural processes, the presence of the full complement of plant and animal communities characteristic of the region, and the absence of human constraints on nature." – Alberta Wilderness Association

AWA's board of directors and staff have an action plan that provides specific strategic goals and priorities for the work we strive to achieve each year. At the beginning of the year we identified priorities for our work. We have success to report in our conservation and education programs, and progress in each one of our priorities. Keeping the vision of a wilderness legacy vibrant and seeking legislated and truly protected wilderness throughout Alberta is our goal.

The work of staff conservation specialists includes developing expertise in geographic regions and specific issues of concern throughout the province and communicating findings and concerns. Conservation specialists are supported by volunteers and staff in both research and administration.

We work with individuals, organizations, and industry, to achieve effective, ecosystem-based management of wild lands, wildlife, and wild waters. When necessary, we are uncompromisingly outspoken and are willing and freely able to engage with politicians on issues concerning wilderness conservation in the province.

The following pages provide a reasonably comprehensive review of our work. We may not yet have achieved our vision and greatest goals of protection for critical Wild Spaces; yet we are encouraged by the progress made.

CONSERVATION

"Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." Aldo Leopold

Critical ecosystems for some species are in jeopardy. With less than 1% of our native prairie designated and legally protected, our challenge has been to increase awareness and help decision makers understand the urgency of our present day circumstances. In this year we have taken action on a number of fronts including truly protecting the Castle Wildland Parks and removing inappropriate activities including mechanized recreation, grazing and off road trail closures; westslope cutthroat trout in jeopardy; threatened public lands and lack of access for the public; perennial issues for protecting sage-grouse; overdue caribou range plans; road densities that threaten grizzly bear survival; forestry operations that are based on harvest rather than our ecosystem health, tailings pond dams that are not safe; insufficient funds in place for reclamation and restoration of industrial activities including wind farms, coal mining, oil sands and several priority areas of concern. While we have focused on these priorities, work and achievements in other areas of concern has also continued. We have remained strong in our messaging on conservation, on the protection of biodiversity and in the power of the people.

WILD SPACES – AWA AREAS AND ISSUES OF CONCERN

“The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need – if only we had the eyes to see.”
- Edward Abbey

WILD ALBERTA MAP

Wild Spaces and Areas of Concern are the names we use to refer to areas that are critical to a network of protected representative landscapes in Alberta. These areas and the networks they can create are the basis of our Wild Alberta map and in some ways represent a visual strategic conservation plan for AWA. This map has evolved through the years from initial hand-drawn “bubbles” to today’s more refined version that uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to detail known critical values, including Environmentally Significant Areas (ESA) in Alberta’s landscapes. Connectivity and the network are vital elements as we look to see the best of what is left; what can be restored and what is still pristine.

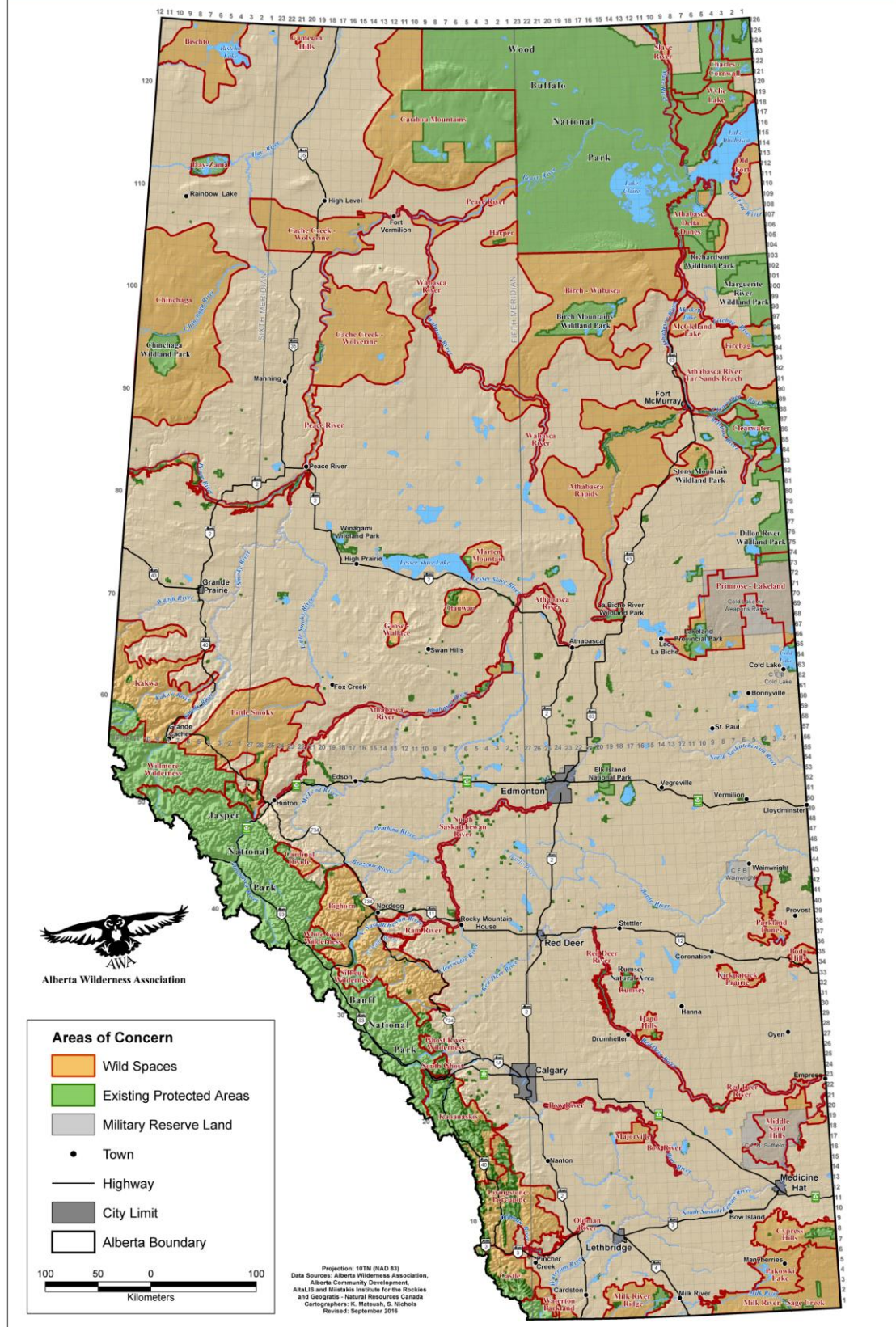
This map is shared regularly with colleagues in government, industry, and the environmental field to create a better understanding of critical ecological values and to recognize the significance of Alberta’s natural capital. It is perhaps one of our most effective educational tools.

The map has been provided in large poster format to a number of schools throughout the province. It is posted on our website to create greater accessibility and is frequently shared and used with industry partners as we help them understand the ecological values of these specific areas. The individual maps for our Areas of Concern are also posted to our website. AWA has been able to remain current with and to apply state-of-the-art GIS technologies in our field work.

Maps provide AWA with a means of communicating information visually, adding context to the work we do that may be difficult to communicate verbally. In addition to adding newly designated protected areas to our map, we were able to create the following maps to support our work this year.

- **Caribou Energy Leasing** – ongoing updates (originally started in FY 2013-2014) and analysis detailing mineral lease auctions within provincial caribou ranges.
- **Caribou Range Disturbance** - mapping of disturbance over time is in progress as the fiscal year comes to a close and will be used for caribou campaign work to urge better protection for caribou habitat.
- **Bighorn Trail Monitoring** – Open Data Kit using Google Mapping API is used to generate and maintain a map of Hummingbird Public Land Recreation Area trails with monitoring observations from Bighorn field work.
- **Public Lands** - creating educational maps to help distinguish Green and White Zones and specific areas where access to public lands has become controversial.
- **Westslope Cutthroat Trout** - critical habitat and range maps have been developed to assist our work creating public awareness of the Critical Habitat Order and the need for areas within the Castle Provincial parks to be better protected.

Wild Alberta



AREAS OF CONCERN

BOREAL REGION

PRIMROSE-LAKELAND

Primrose- Lakeland is one of the best representative examples of Alberta's central mixed wood boreal forest. It has one of the highest concentrations of lakes in the province, as well as significant intact older forests, which together provide important habitat for numerous species of mammals, birds and amphibians.

AWA's goals are two-fold:

- to pursue the best opportunities to extend some form of protection over more of the 6000 km² Primrose-Lakeland AWA Area of Concern that extends north of Lac La Biche eastwards to Cold Lake; and
- to seek ecologically sensitive management decisions for the 600 km² of Lakeland Provincial Park and Provincial Recreation Area, which were created in the early 1990s but still lack a formal management plan.

AWA's November 2016 presentation in Edmonton focused on issues and opportunities in Primrose-Lakeland. In trips to the region in March and June, AWA met with Alberta Parks staff on current recreation and land use issues in the region. During a March 2017 conference we participated in an Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries forestry field trip that included some of its earliest, and some of its most recent ,cutblocks north of Lac La Biche. In mid-June 2017 we organized an AWA hikes weekend in Lakeland, featuring a hike through some of Lakeland Provincial Park's forests, and a birding walk in Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park led by a volunteer from the Lac La Biche Birding Society. We also began to establish connections with Heart Lake First Nation to exchange perspectives on conservation areas.

MCCLELLAND LAKE

AWA's vision is for the entire 330 km² McClelland watershed to be designated a Provincial Park, with its two patterned fens designated Ecological Reserves. The biggest threat to McClelland Lake wetlands is from potential open pit mining of the upper watershed by Suncor's Fort Hills oil sands mine. In late 2016, AWA confirmed with the Alberta Energy Regulator that Suncor had not proposed a viable plan to be able to maintain the flow, levels and chemistry of waters in the McClelland Lake wetland complex while mining the upper watershed; we continue to monitor this situation. AWA is also seeking information on other cumulative and proposed linear disturbances in the watershed from the energy and forestry industries, to try to prevent degradation of the sensitive groundwater-fed fen wetlands.

Alberta's current weak provincial wetlands policy promotes boreal wetland loss. As part of AWA's broader work to strengthen wetlands management, we continue to cite McClelland Lake wetlands as an example of the highest value Alberta wetlands that now lack the protection they deserve.

HAY-ZAMA

The Hay-Zama Lakes complex is a lowland wetland region, encompassing marshes, lakes, swamps, river deltas, woodlands, and wet meadows. In 1982 the region was designated an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971). A portion of the area (486 km²) was established as a Wildland Park under the Provincial Parks Act in 1999. In addition to providing habitat and a movement corridor for woodland caribou and other ungulates, the complex is used by a wide array of waterfowl, shorebirds, and marsh birds. The area is an ecological island in a highly degraded landscape, sitting above a productive oil and gas field that has been actively developed since the 1960s. AWA was instrumental in helping to get the oil and gas industry out of the complex in 2014, three years ahead of schedule.

As an active member of the Hay-Zama Committee (which includes representatives from the Dene Tha' First Nations community, government, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and the energy industry) AWA continues to work with the Committee and to ensure that reclamation proceeds on schedule despite the financial challenges that oil and gas companies are facing in the current environment. AWA promotes the Hay-Zama Committee's consensus-based, collaborative process as a model for phasing out industrial activities within protected areas and had opportunities this year to promote this model in other areas of the province.

In accordance with the 2008 MOU twinning Hay-Zama Lakes with Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), AWA continues to press the GoA to honour its commitments to the Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve. Staffing issues within the GoA, related to the remoteness of this Alberta treasure have made continuity in support and communications with our IMAR colleagues difficult. We are encouraged by the government's recent advice that there is and will be consistent staffing resources for Hay-Zama Wildland Park.

We look forward to celebrating the withdrawal of industrial activity and the work on restoration of the park with the province and the Dene Tha' in the spring of 2018.

Zama Lake - Cliff Wallis



PEACE RIVER VALLEY



Peace River Valley - Nick Pink

The Peace River Valley is one of the most diverse and productive river valleys in the Parkland and Boreal Forest regions of Canada. It is a nationally significant waterway that supplies water to the Peace-Athabasca Delta in Wood Buffalo National Park, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. In Alberta, the river contains a high diversity of fish species, while the valley's south-facing slopes still retain important prairie and parkland vegetation. Plant communities of prairie grasses and cacti support butterfly and bird species that are far to the north of other populations. The valley provides important habitat for migratory birds and resident moose, elk and deer.

AWA's work this year focused on continuing to raise awareness of the significant harm to the valley's ecological values that would result from pursuing proposals to dam the river valley for hydroelectric power. There are plentiful opportunities for Alberta to transition to green energy without the significant damage to our vital river ecology caused by reservoir-based instream hydro. There are already two dams on the Peace in BC (Bennett and Peace Canyon) with a third in construction (Site C). While information has been scarce, AWA has been working to find historical records of fish populations in Peace River, as this is an important benchmark to measure and predict the disturbance to fish population caused by current dams and proposed new developments. AWA continues to work closely with environmental groups and local citizens to ensure Alberta does not allow a fourth on-stream dam. AWA is part of the 'Friends of the Peace River Valley' coalition working to maintain water flows and important river corridor habitat.

AWA's work was significant in TransAlta's 2015 cancellation of its Dunvegan dam project but, as is so often the case, dam proposals are rarely cancelled, just delayed. In summer 2015, we began a concerted effort to stop another dam project. A group of financiers is proposing the Amisk hydro project, which would place a 24 metre high dam across the river about 15 kilometres upstream from the Dunvegan Bridge. This would create a 77 kilometre long headpond, flooding river valley bottom and slopes, including native parkland vegetation areas both inside and outside of the Dunvegan West Wildland Provincial Park. AWA wrote to provincial and federal authorities about the need for federal assessment and a more rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment. The Amisk hydroelectric dam project timelines have been extended once again and AWA is pleased that the project will receive a joint federal-

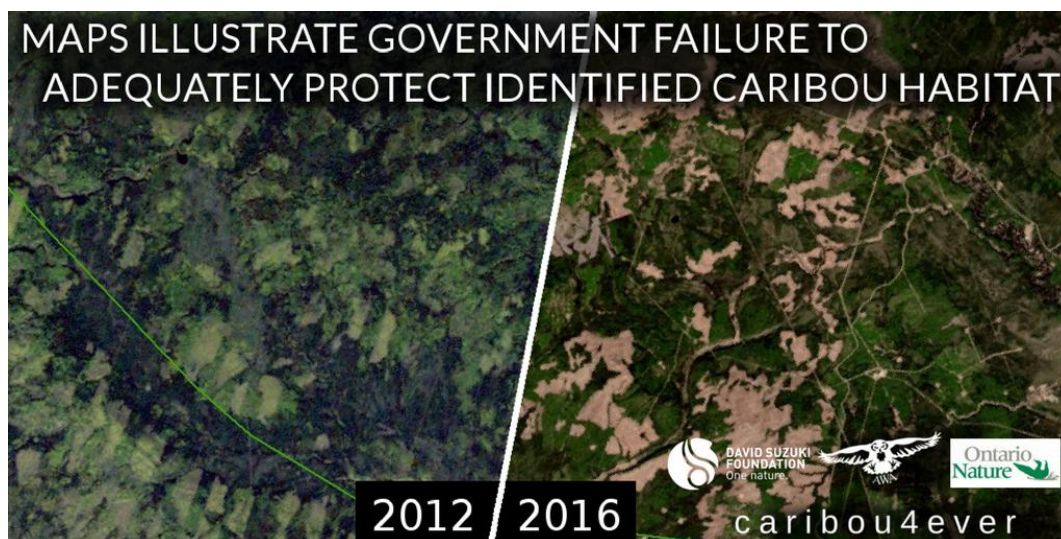
provincial review. We are optimistic that, together with many others who love Alberta's Peace River Valley, we will once again be able to protect the valley from inappropriate hydro development.

CHINCHAGA

The Chinchaga is a large foothills area in northwestern Alberta, much of which has already been significantly impacted by industry. The Chinchaga was recommended by the Alberta government as the single best place for a large protected area in Alberta's Foothills Natural Region but only 800 km² was protected under Special Places legislation. AWA is seeking Wildland Park protection for 6,500 km² of the Chinchaga.

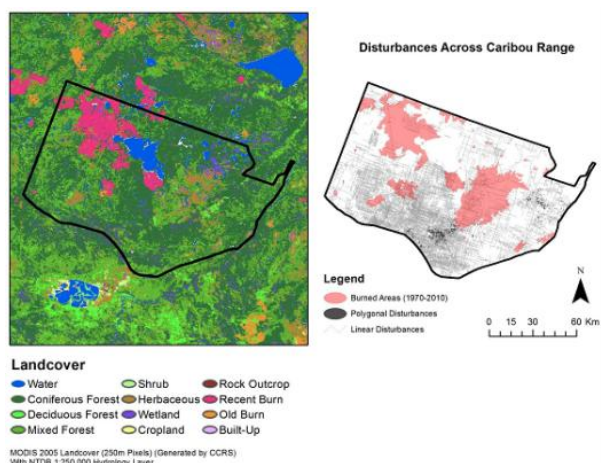
In June 2016, the GoA announced that it was accepting the recommendations of its appointed mediator on woodland caribou range management. This included permanently protecting an additional 1.8 million hectares in northwest Alberta. One specific recommendation was to quintuple the size of Chinchaga Wildland Provincial Park, extending it by 347,600 hectares into an area with no industrial forestry, in order to protect 25 percent of the Chinchaga caribou range. AWA supported this concept in early 2016, during renewed caribou range stakeholder consultations, and AWA welcomed the government's subsequent commitment to expand this protected area. Another recommendation was to complete a Chinchaga caribou range plan by the end of 2016, showing how 65 percent habitat protection would be achieved over time. We will remain engaged on the implementation of these commitments that as of July 2017 have not been realized.

AWA has worked in the months since the end of the fiscal year to develop an interactive mapping tool of caribou range in Chinchaga to show the level of ongoing disturbance in this range. The work is part of a campaign with national colleagues to create better awareness of the lack of action taken by our decision makers and the desperate need for caribou habitat protection.



BISTCHO

The Bistcho region is in the far northwestern corner of Alberta. Parts of it remain a remote and serene wilderness, while other parts of this fragile ecosystem have been fragmented by energy industry disturbance. The area is a diverse subarctic wetland composed of sphagnum peat plateau bogs with collapse scars and channel fens. Within the subarctic ecosystem, soil, vegetation, and wildlife are known to be extremely sensitive to human activities.



Bistcho means “Big Sleep” in the language of the local First Nation, the Dene Tha’. At 426 km², Bistcho Lake is one of the largest lakes in the province. It is unusually shallow, with an average depth of less than two metres, and is popular with anglers, who report catches of 40-lb pike, 14-lb walleye, and 12-lb whitefish.

The Dene Tha’ of Chateh and Hay-Zama have expressed interest in seeing the Bistcho Area of Concern protected as a Wildland Park.

60 percent of the Bistcho caribou range is within 500 metres of human disturbance, according to the 2012 federal boreal caribou recovery strategy. One recommendation by an Alberta government-appointed mediator on woodland caribou range management was to permanently protect Forest Management Unit F20; this is an area with no current forestry tenure. AWA supported this proposed new Bistcho Wildland Provincial Park during early 2016 caribou range stakeholder consultations. This would add 8700 km² of permanent protection to the Bistcho caribou range, which currently has no protected areas. The recommendations also included establishing inter-provincial planning committees with BC and the NWT and completing range plans by the end of 2016. In June 2016, the GoA announced that it was accepting these recommendations. We welcomed the government’s commitment to establish that Park in 2016, and are disappointed that the government has not moved forward with protecting this area or the caribou ranges.

AWA looks forward to opportunities to work for the protection of this area in northwestern Alberta and we are hopeful provincial planning processes for this region will begin in the near future.

CARIBOU MOUNTAINS

Caribou Mountains Wildland Park (5,910 km²) is located just west of Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Alberta. The area contains sensitive wetlands, fragile permafrost, and rare fens and palsas. The relatively undisturbed, lichen-rich forests provide crucial habitat for an important population of endangered woodland caribou that ranges over almost all of the Wildland Park. Up to 120 wood bison live in the Wentzel Lake area.

Due to the area’s isolation, and lack of good biological information, the Caribou Mountains are vulnerable to exploitation. The area contains substantial distance from geophysical exploration. Timber

harvesting is occurring just outside the Wildland Park along the southern edge of the caribou range, and trapping, hunting, and guiding-outfitting occur in the park. The park's caribou herd has declined by about 75 percent since 1995, (July 2010 ASRD provincial status report) and increased motorized access would further stress this endangered species. If the insulating organic cover is disturbed by human activity, the permafrost beneath can melt, damaging vegetation, soils, and water flow regime.

In 2006 AWA participated in the local advisory committee in order to finalize the draft management plan for the Wildland Park. In early 2007, AWA submitted extensive suggestions to the GoA, to support maintaining the area in its relatively undisturbed state. As of August 2017, despite assurances, the draft management plan had still not been produced.

The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2004/5 - 2013/14 provides the following qualitative assessment of current industrial/development infrastructure in the Caribou Mountains: "Substantial geophysical exploration lines. Little oil and gas development. Minimal roadway development. Timber harvesting along the southern edge of the caribou range. Severely impacted by fire over the last 20 years." The 2012 federal boreal caribou recovery strategy noted that 44 percent of the range was disturbed by fire, and 23 percent was disturbed by the logging and energy industries.

AWA strongly supported a recommendation made by a GoA appointed mediator for woodland caribou range management to permanently protect the 6,000 km² Forest Management Unit F10 in northwest Alberta. F10 is adjacent to the western borders of Wood Buffalo National Park and Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park, and has no industrial forest tenure. Establishing a Wildland Provincial Park over the F10 area would bring permanent protection to about 70 percent of the Yates woodland caribou range and add an important protected area for the caribou population in the Caribou Mountains. It would represent great progress towards a minimum of 65 percent undisturbed habitat in these ranges, as mandated for all boreal woodland caribou ranges by the federal caribou recovery strategy. In June 2016, the GoA accepted these recommendations. The mediator also recommended pursuing an opportunity to protect most of the F23 Forest Management Unit, south of Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park. AWA will seek the implementation of these commitments and proposals and remains concerned that no action has been taken by the government to implement the mediator's recommendations for protection.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Throughout this year, AWA promoted the principles behind legislated protection of our eastern slopes wildlands and security for our headwaters. These principles have remained largely the same since our 1977 submission to the Eastern Slopes Hearings and our resulting *Eastern Slopes Wildlands* book. Since then, very little real protection has been realized, yet we have not given up. We are generally engaged in the decision-making process throughout the Rocky Mountain region and continue to advocate for legislated protection that considers the water, wildlife, and sustainable recreation value this area provides.

Northern and Central Eastern Slopes

WILLMORE WILDERNESS PARK



- Ray Rasmussen

At more than 4,000 km², the Willmore Wilderness Park is a magnificent part Alberta's protected areas network. Designated a park in 1959 by the provincial government, Willmore has seen little tourism or recreational development, leaving the area largely pristine. Traditional activities such as trail riding, hunting, and trapping are allowed in the park, continuing the rich heritage of indigenous peoples and early outfitters.

The Willmore is dear to the heart of AWA as a shining example of what wilderness can and should be. There have been battles over continued protection of the area in the past, and constant vigilance is required if protection is to be honoured in the future. That vigilance extends to educating civil servants who frequently demonstrate little understanding of true wilderness and place little value on it. There is an ever-present push for fixed roof structures and routes to make access within the park easier.

AWA continues to press for a management plan for the Willmore Wilderness Park, as the foundation underlying any future developments in the park. There is a real danger that the many individual small decisions being made about Willmore Wilderness will produce cumulative effects that diminish the wilderness resources that the Willmore Wilderness Act was written to protect.

Approved and proposed logging operations immediately outside the boundary of the Willmore Wilderness Provincial Park highlight the need for a long-overdue comprehensive management plan for the Willmore. A preliminary management plan was produced in 1980, but never completed or released. In communications with the GoA, AWA was told that there was a reasonable chance that a Willmore Wilderness Park management plan could be produced in 2018.

AWA continues to be an enthusiastic supporter of designation and commemoration of the Willmore by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Proposals to add the Willmore Wilderness Park and other areas adjacent in the Rocky Mountain Parks, to the Rocky Mountain World Heritage Site have stalled and there is no indication that consideration will be given to the this region in the near future.

Throughout 2016-2017, AWA hosted a number of Willmore presentations including our Annual Martha Kostuch Lecture by well known Willmore enthusiast, Ray Rasmussen, and a presentation in Edmonton on the Willmore by Vivian Pharis. AWA also piloted an initiative for individuals to send postcards to the Premier requesting management planning for the Willmore. AWA plans to use postcards and other tools to ramp up public engagement when consultation on the Willmore begins. In 2018, AWA will continue to press for guaranteed protection for the truly pristine wilderness status of Willmore Wilderness Park.

KAKWA

AWA's Kakwa Area of Concern is adjacent to the northernmost border of Jasper National Park. This area covers the most northerly portions of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta and includes the major wildlife corridor of Caw Ridge. It also includes much of the Kakwa River and Narraway River watersheds and extends north to the upper Wapiti River. The area is home to important wildlife populations, including mountain goats, bighorn sheep and the endangered Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway southern mountain caribou. AWA's concerns include inappropriate coal development, extensive new surface disturbance from oil and gas extraction, and forestry.

AWA opposes development on Caw Ridge and will continue to oppose applications for coal mining, and other industrial developments in this sensitive wilderness. Coal mining in this area, as in other parts of Alberta, has gone through numerous boom and bust cycles and a number of operators and companies. Reclamation and restoration of the area of the mine has been problematic. Grande Cache Coal was acquired by Chinese coal producer Up Energy Development Group Ltd. in 2015. By November 2015, the company closed the mine and laid off 220 employees. Despite hopes of restarting operations in early 2017, Grande Cache Coal declared bankruptcy in February 2017. At this time, AWA has no news about the mining operations at Grande Cache. It seems unlikely that coal mining will be restarted but the question of reclamation and restoration is very uncertain.

In recent years we have consistently called for strict limits on the total oil and gas surface footprint within the caribou ranges here and elsewhere in Alberta. This would enable extraction while motivating operators to pool leases, share infrastructure, and limit corridors and clusters of development compatible with caribou survival and recovery. In September 2016, AWA's vision for and efforts to secure a moratorium on leases was realized. AWA praised the Alberta's government "interim restriction" on new energy leases across Alberta caribou ranges. We also supported Alberta Energy's November 2016 decision to extend "use it or lose it" drilling deadlines on existing leases within caribou

ranges. The pace of overall industrial expansion remains high, and much more needs to be done to responsibly manage development in the Kakwa.

Little Smoky

The Little Smoky region's foothills forests have become highly fragmented by intensive forestry and energy industry surface disturbance. Even so, these relatively wet and cool forests will be an important refuge for forest species under a range of climate change scenarios. Endangered Little Smoky and A La Pêche caribou populations are, at best, barely stabilized by an eleven year wolf cull by the GoA that is an unethical band-aid substitute for addressing habitat destruction by industry that drives caribou population declines. For now, the area still contains a very important native fishery: some small creeks and rivers still support threatened Athabasca rainbow trout; some support threatened bull trout, and many support arctic grayling, a species of special concern. AWA is working tirelessly for the long-term protection and restoration of the Little Smoky.

AWA provided its own input and encouraged broad citizen participation in the comments period for the GoA's draft range plan for the Little Smoky and A La Pêche caribou. A strong final range plan and on-the-ground actions to recover caribou are critical and AWA engaged frequently with planners, federal and provincial elected decision makers, and citizens to advance these goals. In autumn 2016 AWA praised a new forestry-energy-government partnership to pilot some Little Smoky caribou habitat restoration. We also highlighted local trappers' concerns that restoration plans were not coordinated with potential new industrial access approvals thereby unnecessarily wasting costly restoration work. Overall, we continue to seek strict total disturbance limits, clustered energy development on a smaller footprint, and the end of in-range logging. We believe solutions to the fear of economic loss for local communities could be alleviated with the sharing of timber allocation outside these small and highly fragmented west central Alberta ranges.

BIGHORN WILDLAND

The Bighorn Wildland has been a high priority for AWA since the organization's earliest days in the 1960's. At more than 5,000 km² the Bighorn is a large and intact wilderness that retains its ecological integrity due to the absence of roads and industrialized access, yet it remains largely unprotected.

AWA is pressing for the protection of the Bighorn as a Wildland Provincial Park under the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP). Our request has not varied in the last 20 years and is based on the expertise of our board members, staff, and our extensive field work. The 8000 km² Bighorn Back country consists of a 5000 km² pristine wilderness area that AWA proposes would be best protected as a Wildland Provincial Park and an additional 3000 km² with some existing development that makes an ideal transition zone and would be appropriate for a Provincial Recreation Area. AWA is firmly opposed to any commercial development or motorized recreation within the Wildland; however AWA agrees the transition zone offers limited scope for these land uses.

Conversations about membership for AWA on the Bighorn Backcountry Advisory Committee have been initiated by the GoA. AWA is willing to serve on the committee and be an active participant.

TRAIL MONITORING

AWA continues to monitor the motorized trail network in the area of the Upper Ram/Clearwater Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ), as we have done since access was officially granted to motorized recreationists in 2003. In 2016, nearly 50 km of trail were monitored over two trips. The particularly dry seasons of the previous two years continued during the first trip conducted in early July. Noticeable additional damage was observed along the entire portion of the rerouted Canary Trail, with portions of the trail on the slope continuing to slump. Even trail portions not situated on a slope experienced significant damage, despite the fact that there still had not been significant precipitation in the area since the rerouted trail had been built.

Part of the rerouted Canary Trail that was built in 2014. This is one of the newest additions to the trail network and already showing significant vegetation and soil damage; further demonstrating that motorized use is simply not a sustainable activity in these sensitive headwaters areas. Photo: AWA Files



During our August trip, following what was almost a month of consistent rainfall; we found the Canary Trail and associated backcountry trails - which we had visited earlier – were closed on July 28. Although it is important to recognize that a closure took place, it was after almost a month of continued activity on extremely wet trails. It will be important to monitor the extent of trail damage that occurred during this period in the 2018 field season.

The trails which remained open also had significant amounts of erosion damage and water on the trails. Much of the Hummingbird trail was covered in water, even during the return trip home which was two days after the last rainfall.

Concern over ongoing illegal use, fragmentation of this wilderness landscape, impacts on wildlife, and associated erosion and sedimentation from motorized crossings of streams remains paramount in our push to have these trails closed to vehicles. AWA continues to reiterate that the damage indicates that the topography, soil, and vegetation of the region are not able to withstand motorized recreation. AWA continues to advocate for permanent trail closures to vehicles within the Prime Protection and Critical Wildlife Zones of the Eastern Slopes.



We conducted two additional trips to download data from TRAFx units buried at strategic points on the Upper Ram/Clearwater motorized access trail system. These units count vehicle traffic on the trails. Findings are being analyzed and will be reported on separately from this annual report.

In early 2017, the Alberta government re-assessed the Canary Creek trail. They decided that summer use was no longer sustainable and will now restrict OHV use on this trail to winter use only. It will be important to document both the damage that was sustained on this trail during the wet periods in 2016 and the current status of this trail during the 2017 field season. The analysis and report on the findings will be available in a separate report. Our trail monitoring work is dependent on volunteers and we will maintain our presence monitoring the motorized access and damaged sites.

BIGHORN HISTORIC TRAIL

Since 1994, AWA has worked to open and maintain the Historic Bighorn Trail between Crescent Falls on the Bighorn River and the Wapiabi, Blackstone and Chungo Gaps. The 2013 June floods have put this work in jeopardy, and there was no maintenance done in 2014. 2015 was a far drier year than the previous two, and trail cleanup and clearing was completed. During the 2016 summer season we decided to postpone trail maintenance until 2017 in favour of the trail reconnaissance work needed by government trail rehabilitation staff to confirm plans for rebuilding the trail in the Wapiabi and George Creek drainage section of the trail.

Planning is underway for early fall 2017 work, where a volunteer crew is expected to travel into the remote work site at the low pass between the Wapiabi River and George Creek. A boggy or muskeg trail passage must be negotiated. Old wooden corduroy requires replacements and the access and exit points to the bridge need extensive rebuilding. This work will require a good deal of effort by the team of volunteers. Under the 2013 Flood Recovery program the GoA will supply helicopter assistance to transport heavy tools. Volunteers will walk into the site along one route and equestrians will follow another route.



BIGHORN HISTORIC TRAIL - NICK PINK

SOUTHERN EASTERN SLOPES REGION

The Crown of the Continent is a crucial mountain and foothills ecosystem spanning corners of SW Alberta, SE British Columbia and NW Montana. In Alberta, this area approximates the Southern Eastern Slopes, stretching from the southern part of Kananaskis Country to the United States Boundary in Waterton National Park. This region is a narrow forested band of public lands which provide a critical role as a reliable water source across southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It is internationally recognized for its varied and impressive landscapes, biodiversity, and critical wildlife movement corridors. The southern Eastern Slopes contain the following AWA areas of concern (from north to south): South Ghost, Bow-Canmore Corridor, Kananaskis, the Livingstone-Porcupine, Castle and Waterton Parkland.

SOUTH GHOST - GHOST-WAIPAROUS



Ghost Valley looking towards the South Ghost area - Heinz Unger

AWA's main interest in this area is to ensure that wilderness, wildlife, and water quality and quantity are considered in all decisions that are made in the region that is adjacent to and forms the transition zone for the South Ghost area. We continue to wait for action by Alberta Environment & Parks to enlarge the protected area of the Don Getty Wildland Park as promised in the SSRP.

AWA works with Stop Ghost Clearcut and the Ghost Watershed Alliance Society (GWAS) to increase awareness of lawless behaviour and unchecked OHV activities in the Ghost. In May 2017, AWA applauded the GoA for budgeting \$2 million to add enforcement capacity in the Ghost-Waiparous area. The added officers have made a noticeable impact in improving the behaviour in this region. The South Ghost is only one example of many areas experiencing similar problems throughout the Eastern Slopes' headwaters, resulting from uncontrolled OHV use and abuse, illegal firearms and weapons discharge, and a lack of enforcement.

The 2013 Back Country Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program (BTRFP) work in this region has included rerouting motorized recreation trails and building bridges to minimize impacts to westslope cutthroat

trout critical habitat. AWA remains concerned about the problems the trails themselves contribute, including increased sediment delivery, habitat fragmentation, and stresses to wildlife. The ecosystem must be considered first and only then is it appropriate to see where recreation can fit once vital natural ecosystems, including the security of our headwaters and our watersheds are protected.

GWAS continued its vital work of raising awareness and educating the public about the importance of, and the threats to, the Ghost River watershed. Its report, the State of the Watershed is in progress. GWAS cooperates with the GoA in trail restoration and bioengineering projects in the Ghost watershed. The photo shows a field day following a workshop sponsored by GWAS and presented by Dr. Dave Polster on trail construction, rehabilitation and restoration work. The site in the picture was one where the GoA had created deterrents to keep OHV users out, the workshop group planted willows and other native trees to help naturalize and restore the area.



Public meetings in connection with recreational planning in the Ghost that were expected to commence in 2017 have been delayed.

BOW-CANMORE CORRIDOR

The Bow-Canmore Corridor is a crucial, yet vulnerable, internationally significant wildlife corridor, connecting wildlife movement from Kananaskis Country to Banff National Park. Over the past few decades there has been significant development in the valley: the Trans-Canada highway, the railroad, and growing human settlements. AWA and environmental colleagues have worked for decades to ensure a viable wildlife corridor. Without an effective corridor for wildlife movement, there is a significant risk of isolating wildlife populations, preventing natural gene flow and harming their sustainability.

This year, AWA raised concerns regarding a proposed development plan by Three Sisters Mountain Village (TSMV) in the Bow Valley Smith Creek area near Canmore, as it could affect movement of wildlife in this important corridor. AWA recommended that the GoA use scientific studies to determine appropriate corridor specifications for the Three Sisters Wildlife Corridor, to consider cumulative effects in an already highly developed valley, and fulfill the intent of the SSRP to maintain connectivity through the Bow Valley. On April 26, it was announced that the GoA was reviewing the plan to determine if the design meets the needs of the wildlife corridor connecting Banff National Park with protected areas in Kananaskis Country. Another proposal by TSMV to significantly expand its resort centre (it would be four to five times larger than downtown Canmore) at the base of Three Sisters Mountain was unanimously rejected by Canmore town council on May 2, 2017. AWA applauded this decision and hopes for continued leadership both municipally and provincially on wildlife movement in assessing the Smith Creek proposal.

In April 2017 AWA expressed strong concern to Alberta Environment and Parks about a proposed gondola lift up Mount Lady McDonald through Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park. The area is an important regional wildlife corridor and this project is not compatible with the intent of Wildland Provincial Park designation.

This summer highlighted the issues of wildlife movement in the Bow-Canmore corridor. One of Banff's most iconic bears, Bear 148, was involved in a string of human encounters this year. Many of these encounters involved high levels of human use in areas where bears frequent to feed, such as the abundant buffaloberry crops present in the Quarry Lake area of Canmore. The problem was exacerbated by a failure from the public to abide by closures and to keep their dogs on leash. After public backlash against the province's intention to kill Bear 148, she was relocated to Kakwa, where she was later killed by a hunter. It's clear that the trends of increasing development and commercialization in our National Parks and gateway communities such as Canmore are spelling disaster for wildlife.

KANANASKIS COUNTRY

Kananaskis Country is one of the better known areas of the South Eastern Slopes: it has tremendous Wilderness value and provides essential habitat for large mammals including cougar, grizzly bear and numerous ungulates. AWA's vision for Kananaskis is that further commercial and industrial development, including forestry, will be halted until a scientifically-based ecosystem management plan has been developed. Our vision includes the long overdue designation of Evan-Thomas provincial recreation area as a provincial park and the development of more sustainable, small-scale ecotourism economies for foothills "gateway" communities, which is currently lacking.

AWA is a steward for Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve in Kananaskis Country. Stewardship work includes recording observations, installing signs and removing debris and garbage. The last formal trip in June of 2016 was undertaken with the GoA and industry colleagues. On checking in the fall of 2016 and the spring and fall of 2017, and despite documentation and numerous requests, signage in this area is still lacking - the province needs to develop appropriate educational signage for many areas, including all ecological reserves. AWA will continue to work with partners to steward this important and unique reserve.

AWA is concerned that Back Country Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program (BTFRP) funding has been used in Kananaskis and many other areas to rebuild trails that were inappropriately sited in sensitive headwaters landscapes. Some of the trails repaired with the funds should never have been built in the first place. Trails and bridges contribute to erosion and sedimentation in streams, which can have a negative impact on native aquatic ecosystems and watershed health. AWA is disappointed the BTFRP focused more on restoring badly-sited OHV trails rather than much-needed landscape restoration and non-motorized recreation trails.

In June, AWA wrote to state our opposition to a proposal from Rockies Heli Canada to build a helipad at the base of Mount Yamnuska, which is located within Prime Protection and Critical Wildlife Zones as designated by the Eastern Slopes Policy. AWA believes there should be no commercial or non-essential helicopter activity over protected lands or lands zoned as Prime Protection, Critical Wildlife, and ESAs (environmentally significant areas). AWA believes that the use of helicopters especially for commercial and recreational purposes is often incompatible with non-motorized recreational users and the requirements and behavior of wildlife. This beloved area is used by many and already experiences

significant helicopter use and noise pollution from nearby existing helicopter tours. Additional traffic and extreme noise pollution may negatively impact not only those wishing to enjoy this area, but will also aid in further fragmenting this critical wildlife corridor. AWA was pleased to receive a response in August from the GoA, indicating their decision to reject this proposal.

Under the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), a number of areas were promised for designation as new or expanded protected areas within Kananaskis Country. AWA is waiting for the Pekisko Heritage Rangeland to be expanded, and for new and expanded parks in Kananaskis including Don Getty, Bow Valley, Bluerock, High Rock Wildland Provincial Parks and Sheep River Provincial Park to be implemented as promised in the plan. We will continue to monitor the situation and press the GoA to move forward on these designations.

CASTLE WILDLAND

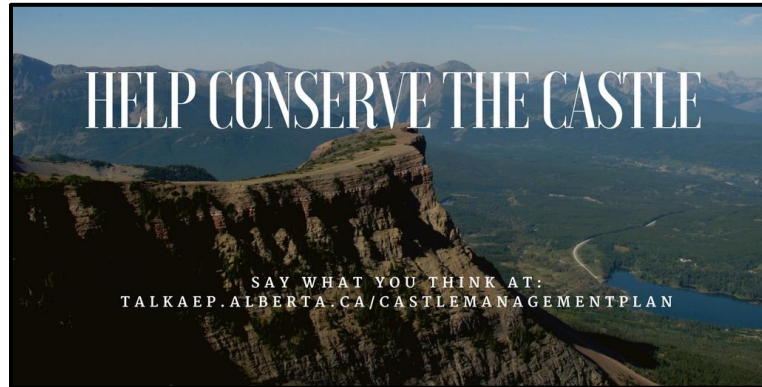
On September 4, 2015, the GoA announced its intention to protect the Castle Wildland through the creation of two new parks: one a Provincial Park and the other a Wildland Provincial Park. AWA has been advocating for the protection of this area since our founding days in 1965 and we welcomed a commitment to finally protect this valuable area. While the announcement for the Castle Parks included stopping commercial forestry, coal and mineral extraction, and new surface access to oil and gas developments in the parks, the list of planned land designations in the parks also permitted ongoing motorized recreation, grazing, and hunting, which AWA maintains are clearly inappropriate activities in a Provincial Park.

In the fall of 2016, AWA participated as a member of the Castle working group, providing feedback on the development and management of the Castle Management Plan.

An Order in Council for the Castle Parks was passed on January 20th that set the boundaries for the new Castle Provincial Park and expanded the boundaries for the Castle Wildland Provincial Park in order to increase protection of headwaters and species at risk. Coupled with an announcement by Premier Notley that all illegal off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails would be closed immediately and all others will be phased out over the next few years, AWA recognized the significant progress being made to offer true protection to the essential ecosystems within the Castle boundaries that are so desperately in need of restoration.

The January 20th announcement also launched a 60 day consultation period for the draft management plan which was released that same day. This marked the beginning of intensive public discourse, including wide support from the general public for protection and opposition to the OHV phase out from some sectors of the motorized recreation cohort. During this period, AWA released numerous news items, organized a Castle social media campaign, and press conferences in Lethbridge and Calgary. This work highlighted the widespread public support for protection, as well as the broad scientific consensus that motorized recreation is inappropriate in these parks.

The following are some of the many social media graphics created for the Castle Campaign, aimed at informing and engaging the broader public about the value of truly protecting the Castle Wildland.



“It would be unconscionable to permit off-highway vehicles and their trails in the Castle parks, which hold some 200 rare and at-risk species.”

DAVE MAYHOOD
AQUATIC ECOLOGIST



#ConserveTheCastle
#CastleParks



"WHERE WILL MY GRANDCHILDREN GO?"

If you believe grizzly bears should thrive in the Castle Parks, tell the province to keep off-highway vehicles away.

Speak up at albertaparks.ca/consult



A group of supporters for the Castle parks attended a press conference in Lethbridge on February 11. Speakers included Lorne Fitch, Sid Marty, David Sheppard (Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition), Andrea Hlady, Dave Hockey (Great Divide Trail Association), Kevin Van Tighem, and Joanna Skrajny.



On March 1, a number of announcements regarding the Castle region were made which included changes to the draft management plan as well as an extension of the consultation period to April 19th. AWA expressed concern with many of the proposed revisions to the draft plan as most of the changes proposed increasing access, use and development within the parks, including the following considerations:

- Increasing road development and infrastructure throughout the park
- Permitting OHV use for the retrieval of game
- Permitting summer OHV use for up to 5 more years and removing the commitment to prioritize the OHV ban in the most ecologically sensitive areas.
- Undertaking a review of winter OHV use before a final decision is made

AWA believes these promises, made without any comprehensive reviews or studies, may place competing land uses as a priority over the primary conservation and protection purposes of the park.. These land uses should only be permitted within the Castle Parks if a thorough science-based review determines they are compatible with a wilderness in need of restoration.

AWA supports either an immediate elimination of motorized recreation or an expedited phase-out so that protection and restoration of this special area can begin. . We believe that delaying OHV trail closures for up to five years may prevent building a positive and loyal visitor base for many years, therefore delaying economic benefits to adjacent communities. We understand the OHV phase out was proposed in order to allow time for the government to identify more suitable areas and to determine appropriate sites to allow OHV use on other public lands. However, this work by the government could be completed in much less time than the currently proposed 3-5 year window and meanwhile could delay urgently-needed restoration work. At a minimum, we support suggestions made by other groups to immediately close all motorized trails within 100m of native trout streams – this would necessarily include the Sartoris Road and any other roads currently being considered.

In the upcoming year, AWA looks forward to the release of the final management plan for the Castle Parks and we will continue to press for science-based decision making and the best conservation outcomes for this incredible area. The Castle Parks are certain to be cherished for generations to come if proper protection is provided.



Ridge walking one of the Castle's red rock canyons - Nigel Douglas

LIVINGSTONE-PORCUPINE

Ongoing industrial-scale logging and motorized recreation in sensitive watersheds continue to be major concerns for AWA, these issues are very much in evidence in the Livingston-Porcupine. There are also new threats to the area in the form of interest in renewed coal development and pollution from earlier coal mining activities.

The Porcupine Hills Coalition that was formed in 2015 by concerned individuals, organizations (including AWA) and municipalities has now expanded to approximately 40 signatories. The Coalition has been meeting regularly with government planners throughout the process of Land Footprint Management Planning (LFMP) and Recreation Management Planning (RMP) in the area.

The Coalition agreed by consensus on a Statement of Principles that guides its work and ultimately aims to guide the work of the planning process. These principles include the recognition of watershed protection and biodiversity as primary objectives, using an integrated approach that considers adjacent private land and the visions of land stewardship organizations. The principles require recognition that the current condition of the Porcupine Hills is not an adequate baseline for assessing cumulative effects. The principles also require that information be used from the existing and comprehensive Southern Foothills Study, acknowledging the precedent-setting nature of this planning across the Eastern Slopes.

AWA continues to advocate for a LFMP which sets hard, scientifically-sound limits on linear disturbance and land use in the region with satisfactory implementation and enforcement. This would help protect much of the habitat of threatened westslope cutthroat trout and other species at risk such as grizzly bear.

The RMP must be informed and guided by the LFMP, set maximum thresholds for linear disturbances (and aim below these thresholds), and set aside areas specifically for non-motorized recreational

opportunities. The plan should reflect the needs and wants of the majority of Albertans and prioritize financially and ecologically sustainable low-impact recreation and tourism.

AWA will continue to meet with the Coalition, other ENGOs and government to strengthen planning. We anticipate that these plans will become available for public consultation within the upcoming year.

The Grassy Mountain Coal Mine is located within AWA's Livingstone-Porcupine Area of Concern. A coalition of AWA and the Grassy Mountain Group remains committed to participate should the proposed coal mining project go to hearing (see Energy – Coal for further information).

WATERTON PARKLAND

The Waterton Parkland area consists mostly of private land to the east of Waterton Lakes National Park. Increasingly, landowners in this region are looking for and implementing ways to minimize the impacts of development on this landscape, as well as developing programs to minimize conflicts with wildlife. AWA continues to support local landowners and conservationists in the region. Letters of support for the landowner positions regarding expanding developments and incursion into wild landscapes in the area have been written to the municipalities. Development proposals that may pose a threat to the Waterton Parkland area in general remain a concern to AWA.



Hiking to Three Isle Lake, Kananaskis Country - Joanna Skrajny

PARKLAND REGION

RUMSEY

Aspen parkland once stretched over 255,000 km² in the Prairie Provinces. In Alberta, the Central Parkland Natural Subregion sweeps in a wide arc from Airdrie to north of Edmonton, and east to Lloydminster and Provost. Today, the Rumsey Natural Area and Ecological Reserve (together, the *Rumsey Block*) are surrounded by a checkerboard of cropland. Rumsey is the only large, relatively undisturbed area of aspen groveland on hummocky disintegration moraine left in the world. It represents a landscape that is almost extinct and provides a valuable ecological benchmark.

Progress has been made on the protection of Rumsey Natural Area from continuing industrial disturbance. As of February 29, 2012, all new petroleum and natural gas agreements within the Rumsey Natural Area include the provision that "Surface Access is Not Permitted." For AWA, this was an encouraging first step in the long-term phase out of oil and gas activity in the Natural Area. AWA reviewed a long-awaited confidential draft of a management plan for Rumsey in 2015 and continues to ask for the draft to be provided for public consultation as soon as possible. There has been no explanation provided for the delay.

WAINWRIGHT DUNES

AWA serves on the advisory group for the Wainwright Dunes and monitors implementation of the management plan approved in 1999 for this nationally significant parkland sand dune and wetland wilderness. Concerns about managing aspen encroachment in the Ecological Reserve have been voiced for years with little decision making or action taken. Research conducted in the reserve shows the threat needs to be managed. There is some anecdotal evidence that Elk populations continue to grow in the protected area and surrounding lands and they may outstrip the capacity of the area in the near future.

King's College undergraduates completed several years of field monitoring, with support from the GoA and the Buffalo Park Grazing Association to investigate wildlife friendly fencing research on the Reserve. They found that the safest passage through the fence, and the most preferred crossing choice for wildlife, was through open gates. There would likely be benefit if gates could be strategically located at preferred crossing points, left open when not needed for cattle and combined with wildlife friendly fencing throughout the reserve. This would likely also reduce injury to wildlife and damage to property. As scientific research is one of the prime reasons for establishing Ecological Reserves it's encouraging that the grazing association and students cooperated for such worthwhile research.

GRASSLANDS REGION

Alberta's track record for protecting the Grasslands Natural Region is abysmal: less than 2 percent of our overall grasslands, and less than 1 percent of the Foothills Fescue and Mixedgrass Natural Subregions have any legal protective designation. This is far below the global 12 percent protected areas target recommended by the 1987 Brundtland Commission (formally known as the World Commission on Environment and Development) which set protected areas targets as part of achieving sustainability. More recently, Canada has committed to Target 11 of the IUCN Aichi Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (2011-2020), which requires that at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas are conserved by 2020. Canada's commitment also promises that "areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes". AWA is working to ensure this commitment can be upheld to benefit our vitally important native grasslands.

The Northern Great Plains ecoregion has been identified as a global priority for conservation and protection as one of the World Wildlife Fund's Global 200 ecoregions. Temperate grasslands are the biome most at risk in the World. Birds that nest in temperate grasslands are the most rapidly declining group of birds in North America.

Large, relatively undisturbed blocks of native grassland are few in Alberta. Much of the native grassland is fragmented or degraded. Although native grasslands are only about five percent of Alberta's land base, they support approximately half of the rare ecological communities, 40 percent of rare vascular plant species and 70 percent of mammal, bird, reptile and amphibian species considered "at risk" or "may be at risk". The remaining large blocks of native grassland are extremely significant for biodiversity conservation and their protection is essential if we are to achieve protected area targets in Alberta.



MIDDLE SAND HILLS

The Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern lies forty miles north of the city of Medicine Hat, to the west of the South Saskatchewan River, and to the south of the Red Deer River. It is approximately 2,480 km² in size. Relatively untouched until recent years, the near-native conditions in the Middle Sand Hills area are reminiscent of the Great Plains as they once were. The extensive mixed grasslands, sand hills, coulees and wetlands that comprise the Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern are home to 1,100 native prairie species, including 13 federal Species at Risk and 78 provincially listed "at risk" species.

A large portion of the Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern lies within the boundaries of the Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield military reserve. As such, the military is intricately tied to the history, and fate, of this wildland. Since 1971, the Department of National Defence has recognized the fragility of the area and has zoned the eastern part of the base out-of-bounds for military training.

SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA

The Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA), designated as a federally-protected wildlife refuge in 2003, lies within CFB Suffield and is one of the last six remaining large native grasslands left in the glaciated northern plains. The NWA comprises 458 km² of rare unbroken prairie containing landscapes of national significance, including sand hills, ancient glacial coulees, and the stunning South Saskatchewan River valley. Home to more than 1,100 species of plants and animals, the NWA is a haven for 94 species of concern, 18 of which are federally-listed species at risk of extinction. It also contains numerous historical sites such as medicine wheels, bison kill sites, and stone cairns. Many of the area's dinosaur remains and fossilized trees remain unclassified.

AWA is working toward increased protection and more ecologically sensitive management of the larger Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern and we hope to see a long-promised management planning process underway soon. There are still diverse views on elk population impacts on the NWA and on adjacent cattle grazing areas. In general, AWA is neither in favor or opposed to an elk hunt at Suffield NWA, provided it is done on foot and the need to control the numbers of elk is demonstrated. The situation at Suffield is somewhat complicated as historical predators of elk, e.g. grizzly bear and wolf, no longer roam the military base area. While some in the ranching community characterize the NWA elk population as too large, AWA believes this is not supported by science; we remain unconvinced that elk are yet overpopulating/overgrazing the Suffield NWA. AWA would support the reintroduction of predators to the NWA as a natural measure of population control.

AWA has been asking the federal government for a management plan for the NWA for almost a decade. While it has been promised many times, there have been no public consultations and no significant movement to release a draft plan for public review. Such a plan offers the best hope that a science-based approach to wildlife protection and management will be implemented with a reasonable measure of public involvement. In the coming year AWA hopes to follow through on the promise for a management plan.

MILK RIVER-SAGE CREEK

The 5000 km² Milk River-Sage Creek Area of Concern in the grasslands of southeastern Alberta comprises three main units:

- Cypress Hills — a montane outlier with forests and lush fescue grasslands;
- Pakowki Lake — an area of sandhills and a large 'playa' (meaning a flat, often dry basin) lake that is very productive for waterfowl and shorebirds in wetter years;
- The balance of the area, including the Milk River Canyon and associated badlands as well as some of the most extensive native mixed grassland, silver sagebrush and ephemeral wetland habitat in Canada.

The Milk River-Sage Creek area is one of the least fragmented, most extensive, and most geologically and biologically diverse grassland landscapes remaining on the North American plains. For generations, this wilderness has been protected by its isolation and by grazing patterns that have perpetuated the richness and diversity of the native grassland. AWA believes the future of the area as a wild place and as a refuge for native plants and animals that have long disappeared from much of the Great Plains rests in our hands.

CYPRESS HILLS

The Cypress Hills, which span the southern Alberta-Saskatchewan border, are recognized internationally as a significant natural area. The upper portion of the hills is part of the Montane Natural Subregion, having been left unglaciated during the last ice age. The hills are surrounded by native grassland, and the meeting of the diverse communities of flora and fauna from these two natural regions creates a unique and valuable ecological resource.

In the Cypress Hills Fringe Area Structure Plan, Cypress County initially recognized the importance of preserving a buffer zone around Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park. When wind farms were proposed in the Fringe, AWA was among those who spoke out in favour of the intent of the Fringe plan, which opposes industrialization in the area. AWA continues to oppose development in the Fringe Area. Regrettably, the proposals have not been denied by the GoA. We continue to monitor wind farm proposals in this area and across Alberta in our areas of interest.

PAKOWKI LAKE

Pakowki Lake Area of Concern is located southeast of the Cypress Hills and north of the Milk River, in the Grassland Natural Region. An area of national environmental significance, it encompasses the large, intermittent lake itself, as well as the surrounding prairie uplands and a large sand dune–wetland complex, including extensive bulrush marshes. Pakowki Lake is an important staging area for migrating shorebirds and provides nesting sites for birds of a quality that occur in few other places in Canada. The area is also important for the rare and uncommon plants found in the sand dune and wetland habitats. A number of endangered species live in the Pakowki Lake region, including the greater sage-grouse, which has been federally listed as endangered.

None of the Pakowki Lake Area of Concern has provincial or federal protected status, although a portion is designated as a game bird sanctuary. Pakowki Lake is designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) through the BirdLife International IBA program. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified Pakowki Lake as a Category IV Habitat/Species Management Area, meaning it should be managed mainly for conservation of habitats and biodiversity. The Pakowki sandhills are public land held under grazing lease; some cultivation has taken place on adjacent parcels of privately owned land.

AWA believes Pakowki Lake should be formally recognized for its national environmental significance with legislated provincial protection. Unfortunately, the SSRP identifies this area for future grassland conservation but does not prohibit new industrial development while planning is ongoing.

MILK RIVER RIDGE

This area is known for its sensitive foothills grasslands, productive wetlands and the only open plains habitat for Grizzly Bears in Alberta. Oil and gas development in the Alberta Bakken is surrounding the few remaining intact patches. The local leaseholders want protection under Heritage Rangeland designation, which AWA strongly supported during the SSRP regional planning process. The GoA has

recognized the area as needing protection in the SSRP and yet incredibly has continued to approve applications for new oil development in this sensitive area.

During the past year, AWA engaged repeatedly with government departments and the Alberta Energy Regulator to seek restrictions on industrial development and advance formal protected area status. Our meetings with the Minister of Energy and her staff have not seen the department move to protect the area. Despite many attempts to introduce the issue and explain the concerns and solutions, awareness of the problem was found to be practically non-existent. Leases that came up for renewal were not denied, despite the fact that this would have been a single, simple proactive measure to protecting this vital area without cost. The Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks has reassured AWA that this area will be protected, and at the present time, there are ongoing assessments on whether the area should be within the Twin River Heritage Rangeland. We are encouraged by this but the problem remains a lack of protection from oil and gas lease exploration in the meantime. AWA continues to investigate all options for securing protection of this area.

AWA led a day hike to the area with members and supporters from the Lethbridge region this summer. For many, it was their first time experiencing the spectacular natural ecosystem on the Milk River Ridge. Many wrote letters and or postcards to the premier in an attempt to increase awareness and response to the need for protection of this area.

MILK RIVER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

After more than three decades of involvement, AWA continues to participate, as a member of the Milk River Management Committee and Milk River Management Society (MRMS), in formal stewardship of the Milk River Natural Area and Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve. This rolling grassland in extreme southeastern Alberta contains a wide variety of habitats supporting hundreds of native species, including dozens which are species of conservation concern. AWA works alongside representatives from the local county, the ranching community, the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, and provincial government agencies.

The decision to form the MRMS and create a lease for the area came out of the management planning process in the 1980s. As part of its mandate, the MRMS is responsible for administering the grazing contract and long-term research monitoring, which has been ongoing since the early 1990s. This region is perhaps the longest continuously monitored grassland site in the province. While renewal of the lease has been stalled in government channels, the renewal is expected before year end 2017.

During the last 3 years, the MRMS has undertaken experimental grazing on the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve (KCER) to study the effects of grazing on attempts to reduce invasive and non-native plant species.

This summer 2,500 hectares were burned in three fires caused by lightning strikes. One started in the Pinhorn area to the west of KCER. The second started in Montana just south of KCER. Cattle were removed safely escaping the fire from the south. The entire KCER and the southern third of the Milk River Natural Area were burned. Photos of the fire including the one to the right were provided to the committee by government staff.



The MRMS generally meets twice a year and will continue to manage this area with maintenance of ecological integrity as a priority. An inspection tour of the burned area by MRMS was planned for late summer, early fall 2017.

Over the years, the local representatives have taken ownership, responding appropriately to threats to the area. Along with the Hay-Zama Committee in the far northwest of the province, the MRMS is an excellent example of collaborative management of a protected area.

PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM

The Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) is a voluntary coalition of stakeholder groups whose members are interested in the conservation of native prairie and parkland environments in Alberta. It is a common platform to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and promote conservation of these environments. Developing and renewing the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP) is one of the main roles of the PCF. The new PCAP was released January 2016 and will be applicable until 2020.

AWA believes the PCF meetings are also an important way to meet with representatives from many different interests and perspectives. Member updates are helpful to learn about the work of different groups. Not every member has the same objectives but everyone is at the table for a common goal – native prairie and parkland conservation.

FOOTHILLS RESTORATION FORUM

AWA has been a member of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Foothills Restoration Forum in the past and attends meetings of the forum. The multi-stakeholder group is focused on best practices for restoring fescue grasslands. The forum provides opportunity for informed debate and discussion. AWA continues to engage wind energy companies and distribute the document *Minimizing Disturbance of Alberta's Native Prairie by Wind Energy Development* developed as part of our work with the forum

WATER

AWA's vision for the well-being of all living things is:

- Alberta has healthy, natural ecosystems in its river headwaters,
- there is plentiful clean water for all Albertans,
- there is province-wide awareness and stewardship of water as a precious, life-giving resource; and
- there is effective, ecosystem-based management of Alberta's watersheds, groundwater, river valleys, lakes, and wetlands.

AWA's water-related work continues to emphasize the important connections between land use and water resources.

Sand and gravel mining in river floodplains remains a regrettable practice across Alberta, despite the harmful impacts to important river corridor habitat and river-connected shallow groundwater. In early 2017, AWA participated in GoA consultations to seek more responsible policy for aggregate mining, maintaining that this is an inappropriate activity in floodplains.

AWA has continued to work with Alberta Environment and Parks and the Alberta Energy Regulator to advance the development of a cumulative effects framework for Alberta's land and water resources. We helped focus attention on the upper Peace and upper Athabasca watersheds, where we believe that intense cumulative water withdrawal impacts for fracking activities have been detrimental to important native fish populations. Our efforts contributed to AER launching a pilot water management multi-sector group in the MD of Greenview in the upper Peace over the winter of 2016-17.

In October 2016, AWA presented to the visiting UNESCO-IUCN monitoring mission to support the Mikisew Cree First Nation's petition to UNESCO, regarding threats to the outstanding universal values of the Peace-Athabasca Delta in Wood Buffalo National Park. In March 2017 we promoted awareness of the Mission's findings that cumulative threats to the Delta are not being adequately managed. We will continue to encourage strong federal and provincial responses to these findings.

In the Hay River basin, AWA supported and publicized research by the Keepers of the Water, Dene Tha' First Nation and ecologist Kevin Timoney on pipeline spills that have been inadequately documented and poorly remediated. We met with the Alberta Energy Regulator regarding its pipeline risk review and we publicly requested more transparency on the environmental impacts of these spills..

In the Athabasca watershed, we continue to seek answers and corrective actions to the regulatory failures that led to the 2013 Obed coal mine tailings dam rupture. The resulting massive spill of contaminated water damaged upper Athabasca river tributaries and produced a plume of contaminated water and sediments reaching far down the river's main stem. In June, the owners of the Obed mine pleaded guilty and were sentenced under offences to the *Fisheries Act* and provincial charges resulting from the incident. AWA was pleased to see the polluter pay but we continue to be concerned by the AER's lack of responsiveness and transparency in regulating tailings facilities in Alberta.

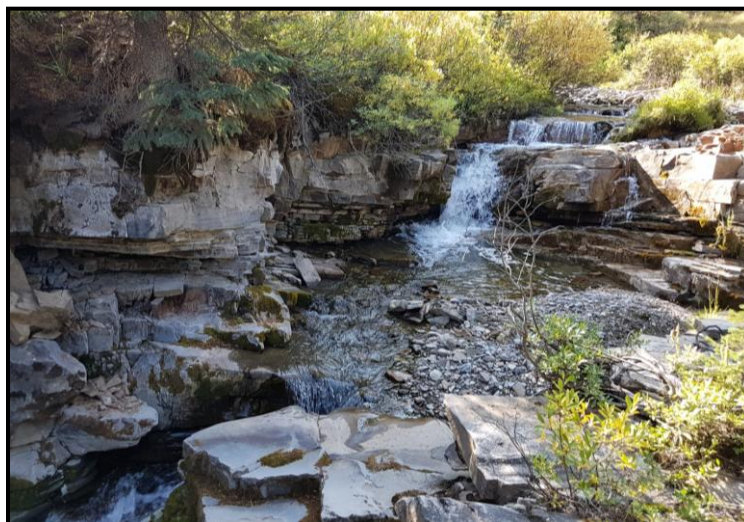
AWA has participated in a multi-sector Athabasca river basin modelling initiative that began in September 2016. In that process we seek sustainable development and protected areas opportunities to

maintain and restore healthy watersheds. We have raised strong concerns about ecologically harmful impacts of proposed on-stream dams and reservoirs. We are also encouraging development of models that capture changes in sub-regional surface water and groundwater flows from land use disturbances to wetlands and uplands.

We were active in several oil sands water-related issues. With other ENGO colleagues we petitioned the federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in October 2016. We asked her to seek answers about the federal government's failure to regulate and carry out enforcement actions related to the significant numbers of migratory birds that land on hazardous oil sands tailings ponds. From May to July 2017, AWA participated as an Alberta Environmental Network delegate to Alberta Environment and Parks' multi-sector Tailings Advisory Committee. The Committee's scope was to propose penalties for oil sands mine operators that exceed their planned fluid tailings volumes. This work also led us to request significant reform of Alberta's oil sands Mine Financial Security Program (outlined in the Energy Issues section).

In the Bow watershed, we continue to take part in annual phosphorus management plan updates to stakeholders. We support the plan's intent to keep cumulative water quality impacts within science-based thresholds, as part of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. We also supported a proposed wetland buffer research project in the upper Bow basin to improve understanding of the effects to water flows and habitat quality of wetlands from nearby human disturbances. AWA continues to track proposals for large dam and diversion structures in the aftermath of the 2013 floods. We will use public consultation and other opportunities to oppose any new on-stream dams, and we will continue to emphasize the importance of adopting 'Room for the River' and watershed ecology principles to reduce flood and drought risks.

Beginning in May with financial support from the Bow River Basin Council, AWA with lead researcher Dave Mayhood and a University of Calgary student, conducted a sediment loading experiment in Silvester and McLean Creeks in the foothills area west of Calgary. The objective is to identify the principal sources of total suspended sediment (TSS) for Silvester, McLean, Quirk and Connop creeks; assess the relative importance of each to sediment loading and fish habitat in those creeks; and quantify the TSS loading to the Elbow River from the creeks, and their relative importance to the total TSS load in the Elbow River. The report is in progress and will be prepared for fall 2017.



George Creek – Joel Van Riper

FORESTS

Shifting the paradigm of timber-centric management of Alberta's boreal and Eastern Slopes forests is an endless effort. Joining forces with many other individuals and groups fighting for an ecosystem based approach to forest management has helped influence some decision making processes, although much more change is still required. Policies need to move towards valuing forests far beyond the price of timber; policies need to consider the purification of water and air, water storage and the related slow release. Healthy forests mean healthy wildlife and healthy communities, they are inextricably linked.

This year AWA followed the development of the Alberta government's proposed 'structure retention' policy that we had encouraged the previous year. The 2016 draft policy proposed to maintain at least 10% of forest structure within merchantable forest stands, which we viewed as the bare minimum supported by research. We were disappointed to learn that the proposed 10% minimum average retention was reduced to 5% plus existing riparian buffers, so less than 10% total.

AWA (Carolyn Campbell) discussed boreal forest management issues at a March 2017 field trip north of Lac La Biche, sponsored by Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries: we learned about several conifer retention approaches and ongoing biodiversity research. We (Carolyn Campbell and Nick Pink) also attended a symposium in June 2017 that profiled ten years of joint government-industry-academic research at a test site north of the town of Peace River; the presentations identified biodiversity impacts of various logging and thinning practices.

AWA has supported local communities and watershed groups to strengthen their advocacy against unsustainable levels of land use including industrial development, clear cut logging and off-highway vehicle abuse in the Eastern Slopes. There are two major themes we commonly see and hear about: a failure to manage forests for their many non-forestry values, and a lack of meaningful public involvement in management decisions.

In July, AWA met with the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Honourable Oneil Carlier. In the meeting, concerns were raised about the need to improve the Forests Act, unsustainable impacts of industrial-scale logging for species at risk including caribou and native fish, and the need for increased public participation and transparency in the forestry industry. Sadly, there is a sense of complacency within the ministry and AWA left with the impression that the department believes there is no need for improvement.



*Nick Pink, Carolyn Campbell, Cliff Wallis, Joanna Skrajny, and Dave Mayhood
on the steps of the legislature - July 2017*

Fish and Forests Initiative

In 2011, AWA's discussions with community members about how to advance inclusive and ecosystem-based forest management in the southern foothills led AWA to form a Fish and Forests Forum. We have continued to lead the Fish and Forests Forum as a collaborative and workshop based way to bring together experts for the past 6 years. Various local groups, scientists, ENGOs and other members of the public concerned about issues related to forests meet two to three times each year, in order to share information and help achieve mutual objectives. Its scope of concern comprises the forests in the Alberta foothills from the US border to the northern Bighorn area and the watersheds in those forests. AWA hosted two Fish and Forests roundtables, in October and April and coordinated efforts of the group on a joint letter to the Minister. The group has expanded to include new perspectives and groups becoming more active in their local communities.

As we entered the 2017 - 2018 fiscal year, forum members submitted a communiqué demanding the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Environment make changes to forestry practices in the southeastern slopes of Alberta. The communiqué was an updated and very brief version of the 2012 report that sadly went without response from the GoA despite similar submissions throughout the past 5 years.

The Fish and Forests initiative remains valid and helps focus efforts and prioritize actions around improving forest management and protecting forest values. Fish and Forests partners will continue to monitor forest harvest operations closely and work together to raise awareness about poor forest management practices. Follow up with the government for a thoughtful response to the groups' demands will be ongoing.

Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow

The *Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow Campaign*, launched on December 4, 2015, is essentially finished. However the communiqué the group developed is a vital resource and has been instrumental in preparing a strong position for protection of our headwaters in the new Castle parks.

AWA stood strong and demanded the government:

- 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 represent a land-use incompatible with the purpose of Provincial Parks.
- Permanently close and decommission OHV 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.

In this fiscal year we have seen the greater public in Alberta become even more frustrated by the failure of governments to exercise oversight and sustainable management of our public lands. Decisive actions which prioritize Albertans' health and well-being, and properly value intact and healthy landscapes are long overdue. *Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow* partners, while not engaged in a campaign, will need to be tireless in efforts to raise awareness and speak up for responsible land management decisions in Alberta's Eastern Slopes.

FSC Canada

In June 2017, AWA and other ENGO colleagues raised concerns with auditors about timber sourced in Alberta's west central foothills being re-certified under Forest Stewardship Council's Controlled Wood standard. We believe that the company-conducted risk assessments do not reflect the high conservation values at risk from ongoing logging, including threatened woodland caribou populations.



FSC General Assembly October 2017 Vancouver - Cliff Wallis

AWA continues to be an active participant in Forest Stewardship Council (Canada) activities, including coordination with other ENGO FSC members working on the new standard for Canada. We have been one of two ENGOs represented on the Standard Development Group which produced a second draft of the new FSC standard for Canada. The final National Forest Management Standard for Canada is expected to be released late in 2017.

Key issues that the Standard Development Group has been putting a great deal of effort into include high conservation value forests, protected areas, intact forest landscapes, caribou, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for indigenous peoples.

The 2nd FSC Boreal meeting took place in Espoo, Finland on May 17. FSC Canada staff attended along with representatives from AI-Pac, Alberta Wilderness Association (Cliff Wallis), WWF Finland and FSC Finland among others. The goal of the meeting was to continue dialogue across chambers to promote awareness and understanding of boreal issues; and to investigate how the Boreal Forest compares to other regions regarding major issues such as deforestation, risks, social responsibility and respect for indigenous peoples and communities. Several motions were discussed, including Motion 37 - Landscape Approach to Intact Forest Landscapes and Motion 38 - Indigenous Cultural Landscapes (ICLs). Both motions apply directly to Canada, since a step-wise approach was used to accommodate First Nation FPIC engagement properly during the development of our National Forest Management Standard. Going forward there remains a desire to put FSC Canada in a leadership role for the rest of the world to show how we can demonstrate wise stewardship of this very important ecosystem.

ENERGY

ALBERTA ENERGY REGULATOR

AWA met several times with Alberta Energy Regulator senior officials to support their work to advance a pilot Cumulative Effects Management system in conjunction with Alberta Environment and Parks. Alberta government officials have promised such a system for years, to use in sub-regional planning and project-level approvals and renewals, but have not yet delivered it. Our interest is to support a good design of a pilot system, including the use of enforceable science-based thresholds to manage and reduce cumulative land and water impacts. We believe this system is essential to progress towards responsible energy development, and it must also integrate with the management of other industrial and recreation impacts.

Alberta Energy Regulator's (AER) Pipeline Performance Report

In February 2017, the AER released the Pipeline Performance Report, identifying recent Alberta pipeline spills by company. AWA is encouraged by what appears to be a step forward in transparency by the AER, but believes that more pipeline spill information must be released. Currently, the report does not provide adequate information about the environmental impacts of these pipeline spills.

Alberta Energy Regulator's Play-Based Regulation (PBR) Pilot Project

AWA has worked since autumn 2014 to insist that the Alberta Energy Regulator's PBR pilot in the upper Peace - upper Athabasca Fox Creek region must address and reduce the intensive ecological impacts of unconventional oil and gas development. In 2015-16, we submitted statements of concern on operators' PBR applications, pointing out the absence of cumulative effects management for sensitive habitat and finite water resources. This year, we continued to arrange meetings with AER and to raise awareness and coordinate information exchange among many conservation groups on this important issue. We believe that our efforts contributed to a greater attention to aquatic ecosystems in AER's pilot water management multi-sector group, which it launched for the MD Greenview area over the winter of 2016-17. AWA will continue to seek the follow-up actions needed to improve aquatic protection. We will also seek to extend this process to the cumulative land disturbance impacts which remain unaddressed.

Oil Sands Mine Financial Security Program

Since May 2017 AWA has worked with ENGO colleagues to assess Alberta's oil sands Mine Financial Security Program. Currently only 5 percent of estimated financial reclamation costs are held by the government, and there are many incentives built into the system to delay timely, progressive reclamation. Many serious unresolved tar sands mine reclamation issues remain, including tailings and peat wetlands reclamation, and remediation of soils, surface water and groundwater. As a result, Albertans are now exposed to significant default risk. AWA has raised awareness with officials, experts and the public on the need for significant reform of this system. We seek a transition to full up-front financial security for oil sands mine reclamation liabilities, to match Alberta's coal mine requirements. It is also crucial to have much greater transparency around liability calculations. We will continue raise awareness on the need for these reforms.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan was a historic announcement by the GoA to respond to climate change by putting a price on carbon pollution and setting emissions limits for oil sands developments. With this comes the need and demand for more renewable energy projects, and the potential for new

renewable projects to create new disturbances. AWA remains concerned about any development that disturbs sensitive native habitat such as native prairie.

The Alberta Energy Systems Operator (AESO), through the Renewable Electricity Program (REP), is encouraging the development of 5000 MW of renewable energy by 2030. On March 31, 2017, AESO began the first competition through the REP by requesting expressions of interest for projects that would contribute to 400 MW of renewable energy. AWA will continue to work towards ensuring that these renewable projects are sited appropriately and effectively minimize their environmental impact and liabilities. AWA will continue to oppose renewable developments on public lands.

AWA contributed to the development of Wildlife Directives for wind energy (which was released in late 2016) and solar energy (released in 2017). Among AWA's main concerns is that the directives are not binding on the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), potentially reducing them to ineffective guidelines rather than requirements. The *Wildlife Act* provides enforcement for much of the directive but it is not strongly protective of habitat. AEP has informed AWA that they are working closely with AUC to ensure these standards are followed: AEP plans to "sign-off" on projects which follow the directive and aid the AUC in creating environmental conditions for approvals. AWA remains concerned about the impact of large solar and wind footprints on the landscape and will continue to oppose development on sensitive landscapes, such as native prairie and public land.

COAL

The GoA has continued its plan to phase out emissions from coal-fired electricity generation by 2030 under the Climate Leadership Plan. The plan states that Alberta will diversify the electricity supply mix by replacing up to two thirds of retiring coal capacity with renewable energy (see "Renewable Energy") and one third with natural gas. This is an enormous task as 43 percent of Alberta's total generation capacity is produced by coal, but is seen as one necessary to prevent extreme climate change impacts. AWA continues to oppose coal projects that threaten Alberta's wilderness or compromise ecological value.

In March 2017, AWA provided input to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) for the development of a federal Regulatory Framework for Coal Mining in Canada. The regulatory framework, proposed under the Fisheries Act, aims to protect fish and fish habitat by limiting the amount of coal mining waste that is released into fish habitat as an effluent. The framework appears to be a step in the right direction for improving the environmental effects of coal mines, but also chooses to ignore some of the larger – and admittedly more difficult to manage – impacts of coal mining. For example, the regulations do not address the environmental impacts resulting from abandoned mines, nor do they address the cumulative effects of multiple mines in a region. AWA advocated for scientifically supported, binding effluent limits, increased testing regiments, incentives, and consideration of the larger scale impacts.

GRASSY MOUNTAIN

Benga Mining Limited, a subsidiary of the Australian company Riversdale Resources, is proposing to develop and operate an open-pit metallurgical coal mine approximately seven kilometres north of Blairmore in the Crowsnest Pass. The project is expected to last 25 years. A loose coalition formed in 2015, the 'Friends of Grassy Mountain', to share information and raise awareness about the risks of re-opening a mine. AWA successfully applied for participant funding with the some of the 'Friends' that are directly affected, this Coalition of AWA and Grassy Mountain Group, will participate should the project go to hearing.

Concerns were raised from the community about economic impacts, and the potential for water and air contamination. In November 2015, a critical habitat order by Environment Canada for threatened westslope cutthroat trout prohibited the destruction of the trout's habitat. The Blairmore and Gold Creek watersheds contain pure stream westslope cutthroat trout, and may be affected by the Grassy Mountain Project if it goes ahead. AWA is watching carefully to see if "mitigation" and "offset" measures proposed by Riversdale Resources will violate the Species at Risk Act and ultimately harm fish populations.

On January 22, 2016, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency determined that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) produced by Riversdale Resources did not satisfy all requirements of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (2012)* and required it to respond to a number of information requests. On January 25, the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) informed Riversdale Resources that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was incomplete. These two rulings put a halt on the review process until deficiencies were addressed.

In August and September 2016, Riversdale Resources submitted an updated EIS and responded to the information requests. In December, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency again found that not all requirements of CEAA 2012 had been satisfied, requiring that the proponent respond to a number of information requests, following which the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency would give an update.

GRIZZLY BEARS



We need to secure wilderness habitat if bears like these are going to thrive
— Christyann Olson

Since the designation of the grizzly bear as a provincially threatened species in June 2010, AWA has worked to ensure that this status leads to real on-the-ground changes in grizzly habitat. Without this, the designation is little more than a paper exercise. The province's 2008 Recovery Plan for grizzly bears was clear that "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." But progress on reducing this access has been slow.

The 2008 Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan expired in 2013 and despite expectations that it would be renewed at the end of 2013 (or early 2014) with only minor changes, the government decided to undertake a complete rewrite. On June 1, 2016, the GoA finally released its draft revised Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. While AWA appreciates the release of this long overdue document, AWA is generally concerned that that this Recovery Plan may put this iconic species further at risk.

AWA believes that the final Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan must apply the Precautionary Principle to reduce disturbances and human access into grizzly habitat before there can be a viable population in Alberta. AWA is anticipating the release of the final Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and will continue working to ensure that Alberta has a credible recovery plan that is enforced throughout Alberta.

In February 2017, Parks Canada and Canadian Pacific Rail announced the results of a joint five year research initiative and resulting commitments to reduce grizzly bear deaths on train tracks in Banff and Yoho National Parks. The research highlighted commonly held knowledge that the railway tracks are attractive to bears and other wildlife for a number of reasons, including increased ease of travel and readily available food. Many of the papers noted that grain contributed to grizzly deaths, however, after the announcement of these research results there was a notable lack of commitments to reducing grain spills. AWA will continue to advocate for Parks Canada to uphold their primary mandate, which is to protect ecological integrity, and work towards stopping the deaths of grizzlies and other wildlife by trains in Banff and Yoho National Parks. Efforts to reduce grain spillage need to be given priority along with the other measures and commitments made.

Bear 148 was a prominent figure in the news this year and highlights the issues of human-bear conflict even in our protected areas. This bear's story highlights the need to prioritize grizzly recovery over human use in protected areas, and to provide sufficient room in key critical wildlife corridors (see Bow-Canmore section for more).

AWA will continue to campaign for the need for the legislated protection of core grizzly habitat, the restriction of human access into grizzly habitat, and the reduction of factors which cause human-bear conflicts. Comprehensive and well-funded Bearsmart programs, together with wellfunded programs to educate land owners and hunters, are also vital.

CARIBOU



Threatened woodland caribou in Jasper National Park – G. Gruenenwald

AWA's vision is for self-sustaining populations of Alberta's iconic woodland caribou. The intact older forests that caribou need also provide homes and resting places for hundreds of other species. Wise management of these forests is vital to our health and economy.

Recent government actions include both positive and negative steps. Overall, unsustainable new forestry and energy sector surface disturbance continues to destroy caribou critical habitat in many of Alberta's already excessively disturbed ranges. AWA seeks a collaborative range planning process to develop plans that over time will achieve at least 65% undisturbed caribou habitat in their ranges; this is the science-based requirement under Canada's five-year-old recovery strategy for boreal caribou. We believe range plans must include protected areas, restored areas, smaller areas of disturbance, and sustainable timber supply sharing arrangements outside ranges, so that caribou can recover and communities can thrive. A long-term commitment to maintain and restore habitat must replace our over-reliance on band-aid measures such as wolf culls and fenced 'caribou zoos'.

For years, AWA has requested that sales of new energy leases be deferred in all our caribou ranges; we praised the GoA's decision to do this in autumn 2016. We also supported Alberta Energy's November 2016 decision to defer its deadlines for mandatory drilling on existing leases in caribou ranges. We met multiple times over the year with federal and provincial government officials to try to advance transparent collaborative range plan processes that would enable participants to choose the best socio-economic actions for communities while achieving the minimum 65% undisturbed range habitat requirement.

We also took part in several caribou-related federal consultation processes. In March we commented on a joint federal-BC report and requested more pointed conclusions to reflect the evidence that southern mountain caribou habitat was not effectively protected. In April we opposed Jasper National Park's inappropriate paved bike trail proposal in caribou and grizzly habitat. At this time, we do not know if the trail will be moved to avoid sensitive habitat. Updates are expected in late 2017. Also in April, we met with the federal parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada to discuss caribou range solutions along with other ENGO colleagues. As the five year deadline for habitat-focused range plans approaches in October 2017, our caribou work will continue to be high priority.

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE



Greater sage-grouse cannot survive without safe habitat for their ritual mating dance and people who care – Christyann Olson

The long-term future of our grasslands, which provide habitat for Greater Sage-grouse as well dozens of other federally and provincially listed species depends on the stewardship of many, not the least of which is the stewardship landowners and leaseholders practice. Just a few years ago, in the absence of any meaningful protection from the provincial and the federal governments, it seemed inevitable that Greater sage-grouse would go extinct in Canada. In 1996 the estimate was 777 birds, by 2013 only 8 males were counted in Alberta. In 2013 AWA, the Wilderness Committee, Nature Saskatchewan and Grasslands Naturalists - represented by Ecojustice lawyers – successfully challenged the federal government to step up protections for the sage-grouse, resulting in an Emergency Protection Order for sage-grouse.

The protection order has resulted in an overall increase in populations: from 14 males in 2014, to 35 counted in 2015. The entire 2016 Canadian population of sage-grouse was estimated to be 340 birds, including 38 females imported from Montana in the spring of 2016. Regrettably, Canada's endangered Greater sage-grouse populations declined this year: Alberta's 2017 spring count included 43 males on 3 leks, compared to 46 males in 2016. Saskatchewan's sage-grouse counts numbered only 18 males in 2012. In 2017, Saskatchewan Environment reported only 2 active leks both found in Grasslands National Park - 22 males were counted, compared to 33 males in 2016. It is clear that sage-grouse populations face a long road to full recovery.

While the results this year did not show growth in numbers of males, we still believe there is reason to hope. Alberta Environment expects increased numbers in 2018 from the offspring of the hens that were successfully translocated. Alberta Environment has also continued with its predator and habitat

projects. Considering the success at the Calgary Zoo in raising sage-grouse chicks, it seems reproductive ability is not the problem, clearly, lack of protected habitat is the issue.

With the cooperation of all parties, including landowners working to protect the sage-grouse, populations can grow. Sage-grouse will require continued protection and active management by the provincial government to build numbers to safe levels. With the information gathered and field work in Saskatchewan, Alberta and the USA, we continue to share information and communicate with other stakeholders so that we can all improve what we are doing out there. Field days and opportunities to learn from each other will lead to better protection of vital habitat. Losing Greater Sage-grouse is not an option.

AWA is currently represented by Ecojustice to participate in the legal action the city of Medicine Hat and LGX Oil have filed against the Emergency Protection Order. The process has stalled as LGX Oil has gone into receivership; a decision from the courts about proceeding is expected by year end 2017.

BLACK BEARS

Although black bears are abundant in Alberta, AWA remains concerned that they may be poorly managed in some regions. We believe that more transparent and scientific data is required to track mortality and incidences of human-bear conflicts. AWA will continue to advocate for increased funding for the Alberta Bearsmart programs, more specific measures for reducing bear attractants, and implementing mandatory reporting of unlicensed harvest on private land. We will also continue to advocate for an immediate end to the outdated and unethical practice of baiting for black bear hunting.

WOLVES

As top predators, wolves play a valuable role in keeping wild ecosystems healthy. AWA's goal is for the provincial government to take responsibility for managing Alberta's wolves in a science-based, responsible and transparent manner. Concerns about snaring and bounties and demands for measured, effective, and humane approaches to wolf management are key. The wolf cull being used to stabilize caribou populations is an unethical band-aid measure, in that it has provided political cover for decisions that allow caribou habitat to further deteriorate. A carnivore management review is overdue and must recognize science, ethics, and best practices for future wolf management. The introduction of wolves in areas that have no predator is one option we would like to see explored.

GAME FARMING

AWA supports living wildlife as part of our economy and we restrict this support to economies based on maintaining populations living wild in their natural habitats. AWA has opposed the domestication, privatization and commercialization of wildlife including on game farms since 1980 when Alberta's Wildlife Policy was rewritten to allow game farming.

In 2011 AWA vehemently opposed proposed amendments to the Livestock Industry Diversification Act (Bill 11) that would have reclassified domestic deer and elk as "diversified livestock." Regrettably we were unsuccessful. AWA is of the opinion that wild game must not be treated as livestock either in

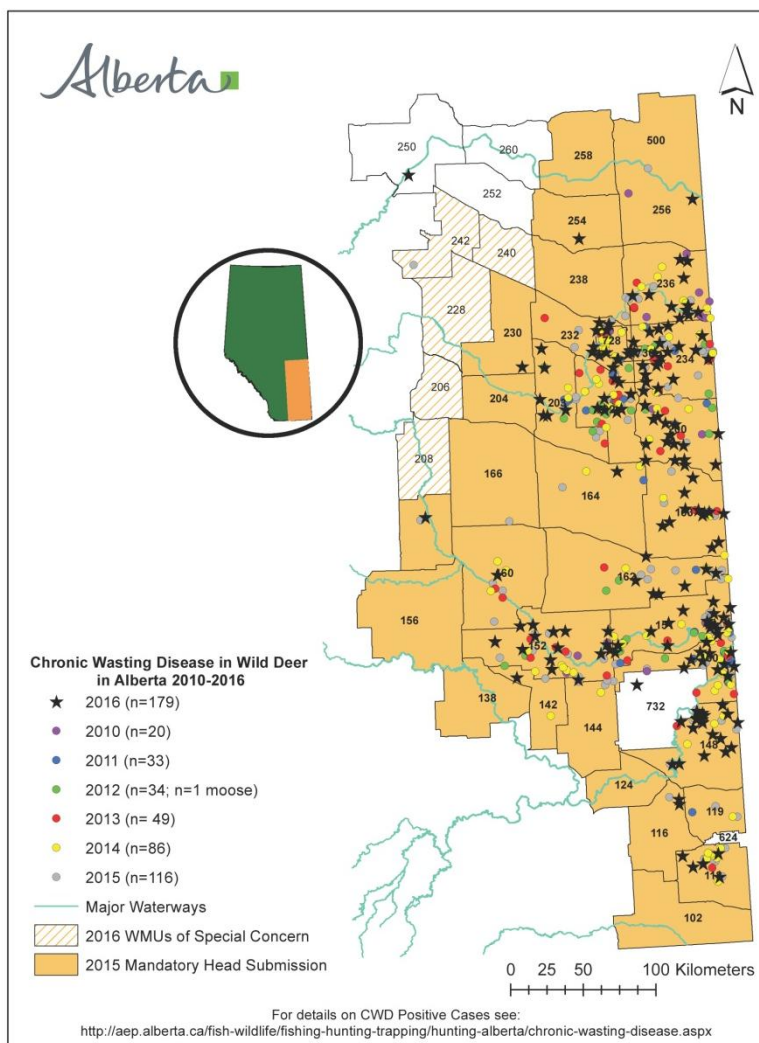
practice or within legislation. Currently in Alberta, the paid killing of game farmed animals remains illegal, although it is allowed in Saskatchewan. Chronic wasting disease (CWD), the pervasive, unstoppable prion disease, had spread from game farms to the wild by 1996. The 2016 GoA Fall Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Results tested for CWD in 5112 submitted heads, 179 of which tested positive for the disease. This is a significant increase in infected animals testing positive since the previous year and includes the first elk from the Suffield region.

CWD occurs from the Battle River in the north to the Milk River in the south, and has now been found in the Hand Hills near Drumheller and in the Bow River drainage near Lake Newell. The infection was found near Bassano in the Red Deer drainage in 2013. In 2014, it was further entrenching along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. In the 2015/16 sample, 6 new Wildlife Management Units were identified to have CWD where the disease was previously not known to occur.

Expansion of infection continued relentlessly westward in 2016-2017 with a case found in the upper Battle River within 30 km of Edmonton. The most infected watersheds are the North Saskatchewan, Red Deer, Battle and Vermilion Rivers. The tragic finding of an infected elk in the Suffield herd was expected.

AWA has requested both federal and provincial leadership in confronting CWD and in eliminating the game farming industry in the province where its costs far exceed its benefits. Additional concerns include the practice of farmers storing excess grain, including wheat, in open piles on the ground until covered storage or cartage becomes available. Such piles are often available to wildlife where they can be contaminated with feces, urine and saliva. CWD could enter the human food chain via this route or through consumption of CWD-infected kills.

Though there is no record of CWD jumping the species barrier to humans, AWA has long held that it will likely only be a matter of time. A similar prion disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), provides a cautionary tale as it had not jumped that barrier either, until it did, with devastating consequences. In April 2017, preliminary findings from a study of long-term exposure of CWD to macaques conducted at the University of Calgary indicated that those that were fed deer meat



eventually developed symptoms of the disease. Health Canada and province recommend “avoiding consumption of foods from known infected or any diseased animals”.

In 2015, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) declared the situation “out of control” in Alberta and Saskatchewan and apparently has pulled back from further attempts at eradication. Although it can be objectively said that the situation is in fact "out of control", stopping any efforts at eradication is an irresponsible decision. Professionally handled eradication that removes entire bodies and disposes entirely of any that indicate CWD must be implemented. Culling of CWD-infected animals must also be encouraged by natural means. This requires redeveloping natural predator/prey relationships in infected areas. It would include reintroducing wolves into areas where they historically existed. This could remove infected animals at far less cost and possibly greater efficiency than through expensive culling programs. Immediate actions must be taken to prevent further spread of this epidemic before CWD spreads to humans.

FERAL HORSES

As a conservation organization, AWA is concerned with the persistence of Alberta’s natural biological diversity including wildlife and natural ecosystems. Feral horses are an introduced species to Alberta. As such, they may have an adverse effect on native wildlife populations through direct competition or through altering ecosystem interactions, and they may have a negative impact on ecosystems that are sensitive to the types of disturbances caused by large herds of the horses. Globally, it is well-established that invasive introduced species are among the top five greatest threats to biological diversity. The protection of feral horses in Alberta, therefore, does not fit within our mandate of protecting Alberta’s wildlife and wild places.

AWA participates in Alberta's Feral Horse Advisory committee (AFHA) in order to defend the needs of native wildlife and to promote a scientific approach to policy development. We believe a provincial feral horse policy should be developed in the context of protecting native species and natural ecosystem processes and in conjunction with an updated policy for native wildlife.

The final report of the AFHA "Alberta’s Feral Horses: Informing an Integrated Management Approach" was published in September of 2015. The report notes that Sundre hosts the largest feral horse population on the Eastern Slopes despite efforts to control the population in the area, with the Ghost River area hosting the second-largest population. The capture program will continue to be an integral approach through which populations are managed, although the 2016 pilot program to dart mares in the Sundre area with contraceptive has shown encouraging results. This program is being carried out, with GoA approval, by the volunteer group, Wild Horses of Alberta Society (WHOAS). The program requires a huge volunteer effort to accurately identify feral horses and then to get close enough to dart them successfully with contraceptive three times for greatest efficacy. WHOAS is now seeking permission to carry out darting from aircraft since the horses quickly learn the approach of humans may mean a sharp sting. Despite the contraceptive program however, a very thorough aerial counting program carried out in the spring of 2017 indicates a population of over 1,200 feral horses along the Eastern Slopes. No capture program was conducted during the 2016-2017 winter.

After five years of working to develop a strategy for managing feral horses on the Eastern Slopes, Alberta's Feral Horses Advisory Committee is expected to release a draft strategy late in 2017.

NATIVE TROUT

Alberta is home to several different species of native trout that have adapted to thrive in cold, clear streams and lakes of the Rocky Mountains and Foothills. Despite many of them having large historical ranges reaching all the way to the prairies, native trout populations currently occupy only a small fraction of that range in small, isolated patches.

The decline of native trout in Alberta indicates that our watersheds are not healthy and land uses need to be considered more carefully to ensure native trout populations persist in the future. AWA has taken a stand on several ongoing proposals that we believe will harm native fish species. In general, forest management practices, management of motorized recreation, and protection of critical habitat all need to be greatly improved if native trout are to have a chance of recovering. No new development (e.g. roads, trails, transmission lines, pipelines, well sites, buildings, fences, bridges) should be allowed in areas that may damage critical habitat. We also continue to be opposed to the surface coal mine proposal in the Crowsnest Pass that could have severe impacts on nearby creeks home to threatened (and federally protected) westslope cutthroat trout.

While westslope cutthroat trout are the only species currently with legal habitat protection, other species including bull trout and Athabasca rainbow trout are currently under federal review for listing. Therefore, it is important that the Precautionary Principle be applied to land use decisions affecting all threatened native fish species. AWA will continue to raise awareness about the important connection between healthy water and abundant native trout.

Athabasca Rainbow Trout

Athabasca Rainbow Trout is currently listed as threatened under the Alberta *Wildlife Act* and currently being considered to be listed as Endangered under the Species at Risk Act, (SARA) a federal statute. In 2016 AWA wrote in support of COSEWIC's status assessment of the species as endangered and urged the government to list the species as Endangered, followed by swift development of a recovery strategy and legal protection of its critical habitat. We continue to await federal listing of this species.

Bull Trout

In July of 2015, AWA wrote in support of a Threatened listing for bull trout under SARA. We continue to await federal listing of this species. This year, AWA was also involved in provincial recovery efforts for Bull Trout, participating in the development of a recovery strategy for the species. We anticipate implementation of recovery efforts will begin in 2018.

Westslope cutthroat trout

Westslope cutthroat trout has been an ongoing priority for AWA conservation efforts. Alberta's westslope cutthroat trout is provincially and federally designated as threatened. After repeated unsuccessful requests for the previous federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to issue a critical habitat order as required by SARA, AWA and the Timberwolf Wilderness Society filed an application on September 18, 2015 in Federal Court. The application sought an order from the court directing the Minister to issue a critical habitat order for the Alberta population of westslope cutthroat trout.

A critical habitat order was issued by the Minister for that population, on December 2, 2015. . This engaged section 58(1) of SARA prohibiting a person from destroying the functions, features and attributes of all critical habitat identified in the Order. Penalties include fines of up to \$1,000,000 or imprisonment up to 5 years.

Now that, a recovery plan is developed, and a critical habitat order issued, protection and restoration of this species and its habitat must be effectively implemented. AWA is working to ensure that recovery of the species is more than just a paper exercise; it will require significant changes to the way Alberta's headwaters are managed.

Specifically, AWA has worked to ensure that on-the-ground changes are occurring for this threatened species in several processes:

1. As a member of the Castle working group, we pointed to the opportunity that the Castle Parks present for westslope cutthroat trout recovery. We continue to advocate for an immediate or expedited ban of motorized recreation from the Castle Parks, as it is incompatible with the purpose of protected areas and allowing it would further threaten westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat and may prevent this species' recovery.
2. AWA will continue to advocate for a drastic reduction of all linear disturbances in watersheds containing westslope cutthroat trout in the Livingstone Porcupine planning process (see *Livingstone-Porcupine* section).
3. Along with the Timberwolf Wilderness Society, AWA has been working to ensure that the federal government completes its legal obligations to publish an Action Plan for how it intends to recover westslope cutthroat trout and we expect to continue this work in the following year.
4. AWA has provided feedback on the Banff National Park Multi Species Action Plan; namely, that it failed to adequately meet its requirements for such a plan under SARA.



Westslope Cutthroat Trout – Dave Mayhood

WOOD AND PLAINS BISON

American bison are a keystone species to the prairie ecosystem, but due to a number of limiting factors including habitat fragmentation, policy, and disease, they are in dire need of recovery in Alberta. AWA's main concern is that wild bison herds remain wild and they be managed as such. We define 'wild' as bison that have not been subject to gene introgression through hybridization with cattle.

COSEWIC's last assessment recommended that wood bison be down listed under SARA to 'special concern' from 'threatened' and AWA does not support this change. The draft recovery strategy has promising direction; however, no critical habitat was identified due to the complexity of this task. There is a timeline to determine critical habitat by 2021. AWA is encouraged that the Ronald Lake bison herd's status in Alberta has changed to become a Subject Animal, meaning it is protected as wildlife. The Ronald Lake herd is known to be disease free. The Wabasca herd is also known to be disease free, but is not protected as wildlife and with only 30-40 individuals remaining, is at serious risk of extirpation unless protection is ensured.

AWA believes the recovery of wood bison is possible with legislative change, the development of strong action plans, and the designation of critical habitat. The status down listing of wood bison in Alberta is pending.

Plains bison are considered livestock in Alberta. This creates conflict in terms of managing the 'extirpated' wild plains bison versus the domestically raised plains bison. Last year, the subspecies listing under SARA by COSEWIC was changed to 'endangered'. AWA continues to encourage the GoA to adopt a strategy to differentiate the status for wild bison and domestic bison based on ownership. Their status would depend on whether they are located on a commercial farm, a private conservation herd or in the wild. This way, wild bison would get the protection that they desperately need to begin recovery in the wilderness. Following the Buffalo Treaty anniversary in Banff at the American Bison Society conference, the gathering of First Nations passed a resolution calling on Premier Rachel Notley to change the status of plains bison to wildlife. AWA is hoping this treaty, as well as the reintroduction of plains bison into Banff National Park will enable this government to have a conservation mindset and move this government toward designating plains bison as wildlife.

In early February 2017, a herd of 16 plains bison were released into an enclosed pasture in Panther Valley, on the eastern edge of Banff National Park. In late April throughout May, 10 bison calves were born from pregnant females introduced into the Park. The herd of bison are planned to be released from their enclosure, into a 1,000 km² reintroduction zone in July 2018. AWA supports the reintroduction of extirpated species, but there are concerns about this reintroduction project, namely, the impacts of fencing on the movement of other wildlife, the potential for commercialization of the bison herd, and the lack of space. Any fencing required for wild bison management must be minimal and "wildlife friendly". AWA has called for a commitment to keep out roads and other incursions into the area and that tourism opportunities be limited to those who walk into the area.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

"It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government to save the environment." Ansel Adams

PUBLIC LANDS

Public lands issues have been a priority of AWA since the organization was founded. A comprehensive and publicly developed public lands policy is desperately needed in Alberta and yet the departments responsible display no sense of urgency. A comprehensive publicly developed policy needs to address access issues, sales and transfers, surface rights compensation from oil and gas to grazing lessees, and conservation. AWA opposes any further destruction of native prairie grassland and sales of public land until a public lands policy is developed through a transparent and democratic public process.

An Auditor General Report published July 2015 was critical of the GoA, noting that it does not track lease transfers or the value of leases or the benefits, including substantial monetary compensation obtained under the Surface Rights Act realized by grazing leaseholders. AWA has been, and will continue, pressing the government to follow up on the Auditor General's recommendations. We have met with civil servants responsible for policy and regulatory development and realize the process is slow and we will need to tenaciously follow the work undertaken.

Access issues into public lands with a grazing lease disposition have worsened. A number of grazing leaseholders have prevented the public from accessing the leased land for recreational purposes. The restrictions are enabled by the Recreational Access Regulation, which was enacted in 2003 under the Public Lands Act. The regulation was to expire in March 2017, but was renewed without full stakeholder or public consultation. AWA is currently working to advocate for a public lands policy that would in part address this issue.

In spring 2017, AWA began a social media campaign to raise awareness of Alberta's wide variety of public lands. The goal of this campaign, called "AWA Wild Spaces", is to celebrate the land we have access to in Alberta, as well as providing citizens with an opportunity to learn more about public lands in Alberta and ways to help improve the management of public lands.





AWA Wild Spaces social media campaign photos

During the summer of 2017, AWA began creating a film series, called “Our Public Lands: A Treasure to Protect” with support from The Calgary Foundation. These short videos are about four minutes long and provide short information bites from a variety of experts and users of public lands. The goal of these videos is to educate and create awareness of the issues facing public lands in Alberta, whilst also encouraging public involvement. Some topics that will be addressed include “What are public lands?”, “What are the impacts of the use and abuse of public lands?”, “What are the laws and regulations that govern public lands?”, and “Can I use public lands?”

TAX-RECOVERY LANDS

Tax-recovery lands are lands that were at one time privately owned and forfeited to the GoA as a result of failure of their owners to meet tax obligations. Since 1930, the province of Alberta has managed some of these lands as public land. Most of this land has been under grazing leases for decades. AWA believes the long-term interest of all Albertans is best served by retaining tax-recovery lands as a trust held by government for conservation purposes.

Despite enormous public opposition to sales of public lands the GoA has disposed of tax-recovery lands, with no opportunity for any form of public input. A program to transfer tax-recovery lands to municipalities and others began in 2011 and was expected to be completed spring 2017. Sensitive lands on or near rivers, water bodies or coulees are being retained by the province as public land.

PROTECTED AREAS - PROVINCIAL

The Land Use Framework is at present the formal mechanism for achieving provincially protected areas. The process is slow and has essentially been stalled for the past two years. Management plans to operationalize the Framework are even slower. Alberta has a very long way to go to meet international protected area targets that are representative of the six landscape types in Alberta. AWA will continue to provide reasonable suggestions for protection, deferral of activities and alternative mechanisms for achieving conservation and protection.

PROTECTED AREAS - FEDERAL

AWA continues to express concern over commercialization of the National Parks. The new Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (as of the October 2015 federal election) was given the mandate to “Protect our National Parks by limiting development within them, and where possible, work with nearby communities to help grow local eco-tourism industries and create jobs.” Despite this mandate, however, in July 2015 changes to the Site Guidelines for the Lake Louise Ski Area in Banff National Park were approved, 12 out of 13 development proposals await agency consideration in the endangered caribou range at Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park, and \$66 million was announced for a trail in Jasper while scientific monitoring and interpretive programs remain comparatively underfunded.

Visitor numbers have been at their maximum this year, even causing visitors to be turned away by enforcement officers from Lake Louise due to public safety concerns during the July long weekend. The parks will undoubtedly experience increased visitor numbers during free visitation in 2017. How Parks Canada will continue to provide for conservation objectives while our parks are being “loved to death” is unclear. AWA works with regional organizations and colleagues in the National Parks to push for processes and policy directions that are transparent, recognize conservation goals, and prioritize ecological integrity.

LAND-USE FRAMEWORK (LUF)

AWA has participated actively as the regional planning processes for the first three Land-Use Framework regions – the Lower Athabasca, South Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan – have developed. AWA supporters have been encouraged to participate at every opportunity in the planning process.

LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN (LARP)

For the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP), AWA seeks completion of overdue promised elements of land and water management. In meetings and workshops with government officials, we continued to request official proclamation of LARP Wildland Park protected areas and the completion of a LARP biodiversity management framework that would include promised surface disturbance limits. We encouraged progress and transparency on important South Athabasca and Moose Lake sub-regional plans. There has been little information on these processes, which we believe should be presenting scenarios of linear disturbance and include public input to improve management of sensitive habitat and watersheds. AWA intends to contribute to the upcoming five year review of LARP in late 2017.

SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (SSRP)

AWA continued to provide input on the continued land-use planning processes in the SSRP. The Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Linear Footprint Management Plan (LFMP) and Recreation Management Plan (RMP) were priorities of the SSRP (see 'Livingstone-Porcupine'). The LFMP is still in draft form and is expected to be released in the upcoming year along with the Biodiversity Management Framework and RMP. AWA believes these plans should establish strict and enforceable limits on land use and linear densities within the Livingstone and Porcupine, as well as the South Saskatchewan Region broadly, in order to meet conservation targets.

The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan was amended this year when Cabinet approved Orders-in-Council to establish the Castle Provincial Park and expand the Castle Wildland Provincial Park on January 20, 2017. These boundaries became effective on February 16, 2017. AWA will continue to push for the enactment of the remaining SSRP conservation commitments through Orders in Council formalizing conservation boundaries.

AWA will also continue to push for ongoing commitment from the provincial government to establish additional conservation areas, with a priority focus for grasslands Natural Subregions (Section 3.14 of the SSRP).

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (NSRP)

Work on the NSRP was started in 2014 but has been hampered by competing priorities within the provincial legislature and the election of the new Alberta government in May 2015. Consequently, little progress has been seen so far.

A terms-of-reference document and public workbook were released in 2014, with Phase I public and stakeholder consultation sessions being held and a Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) being convened and subsequently an advice document drafted. This document is awaiting ratification by caucus before it can be released to the public and the NSRP process can continue. It was hoped that this would occur early in fall 2015 and a draft version of the plan released within the year. However, the RAC advice has yet to be released and no draft is to be seen. It is expected that the release of the RAC advice will be imminent, but the timeline for the draft NSRP is unknown.

AWA has been actively involved with AWA staff, board members, and volunteers attending more than half of the Phase I consultation sessions. AWA continues to have discussions with government members in support of increasing the network of protected areas in the North Saskatchewan Region, and expects to be heavily involved in providing feedback and engaging members in upcoming drafts of the NSRP.

FUTURE LAND USE PLANNING REGIONS

The next planning processes to commence are expected to be the Upper Peace Regional Plan (UPRP) and Upper Athabasca Regional Plan (UARP). However, the delays in meeting the plans created in the LARP and SSRP likely means planning for these areas is not going to happen in the near future.

In anticipation of the start of these future planning processes, AWA collaborated with other ENGOs and academics under the title of the *Northern Alberta Conservation Areas Working Group*. The goal of the working group was to draft a set of science-based maps and proposals for the layout of future conservation areas that would feed into the future planning processes for those LUF regions. It was also hoped the working group proposal might form the core of a suite of public documents, usable as education and communication tools related to wild species and wilderness conservation in northern Alberta. AWA worked with the group and in the end did not agree with the results of the modeling. It did not show areas AWA knows to be of importance in [these regions](#) and in need of protection. AWA plans to expand some areas of our Wild Spaces Map but we cannot endorse the map the group developed as being representative of the important areas to be conserved. AWA did however develop an info-graphic representation of the group's findings that showed important Foothills and Boreal landscapes in the northwest part of the province.

WETLAND POLICY

AWA continues to work towards a clear 'no net loss' wetland policy that a strong majority of Albertans supported in extensive public consultations in 2007. The provincial wetlands policy implemented in July 2016 across Alberta's public lands or 'green zone' area regrettably promotes ongoing green zone wetland loss by downgrading wetlands' values where they are 'abundant'. It also fails to protect wetlands of the highest value for the long-term benefit of Albertans. This weak policy is especially concerning when applied to our extensive boreal peat-forming wetlands. Peat wetlands are much more difficult to reclaim than typical prairie pothole wetlands, yet they play critical roles of storing and purifying water, providing important wildlife habitat, and buffering the effects of drought and fire on adjacent forests.

In summer and autumn 2016 AWA raised concerns with government policy officials over these wetland green zone policies. Several of our public and stakeholder presentations included key messages on the need to limit impacts on boreal wetlands to safeguard the boreal forest's ability to buffer fire and drought. In late 2016 we also urged progress on the overdue wetlands monitoring program component of the federal-provincial oil sands monitoring program.

WATER FOR LIFE

Alberta's 'Water for Life' strategy was developed in 2003 and has these three goals: safe, secure drinking water supply; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. The multi-sector Alberta Water Council provides advice to the provincial government on implementing Water for Life goals. Since November 2007, AWA has been an Alberta Water Council Environmental Sector Board member. In the past year, we supported the advancement of Council's lake watershed management recommendations.

The Water for Life strategy includes support for regional watershed planning and advisory councils (WPACs). AWA is a member of most WPACs. These multi-sector Councils have promoted many positive

watershed-based reports and education activities connecting land uses, water quality and water quantity.

In 2016-17, AWA's Carolyn Campbell completed a two-year term on the Athabasca Watershed Council Board as a stewardship sector member. This Board work included expanding the Council's staffing, engaging in a provincial government WPAC review process, and supporting 'State of the Watershed' report development. AWA also participated in forums held by the Bow River Basin Council, Red Deer River Watershed Alliance and North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance. We were pleased to attend the Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance's Annual General Meeting and to hear guest speaker Dr. Michael Church, the world's leading authority on the effects of dam regulation on the Peace River, discuss his extensive research.

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

In the 1990s Alberta made important national and international commitments to maintain and restore biodiversity. AWA has consistently encouraged delivery on those commitments. When the Alberta government released its long-delayed draft provincial Biodiversity Strategy for public consultation in 2014, AWA encouraged the Alberta government to strengthen and finalize the Strategy. This year in several discussions with policy officials we continued to seek completion of a strong Strategy, but its progress appears to be stalled. We also continue to offer input on principles for related conservation offset policies.

AWA has reported on and made use of Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) research since ABMI began publishing ten years ago. ABMI identifies important trends in abundance and distribution of hundreds of provincial plant, insect and animal species, and it integrates this information with its detailed mapping of human-caused disturbance. In June 2017, AWA agreed to join ABMI's multi-sector Steering Committee to oversee a 10 year review of its science programs.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS CONSULTATION

AWA participated in the Minister of Indigenous Relations' Calgary consultation session in April 2017 on reforming the way that indigenous communities participate in and are consulted on resource development.



Prickly Pear Cactus - Joanna Skrajny

SPECIES AT RISK

AWA is actively involved in providing feedback and recommendations for Alberta's species at risk, whether they are provincially or federally designated. Federal legislation provides stronger measures of protection than Alberta's *Wildlife Act*, so when urgent action is needed, AWA pushes for a more comprehensive provincial policy and legislation, and for the federal enforcement to be as strong as possible.

In January, AWA sent a letter to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change with seven other ENGOS, including the David Suzuki Foundation and the Canadian Wildlife Federation, requesting a meeting to discuss the future of Canada's endangered species, including boreal caribou protection. Under the Species at Risk Act, one or more action plans must be created for a listed species under a certain timeline.

FEDERAL SPECIES AT RISK ACT (SARA)

Effective application of SARA to bring about more habitat protection is needed. Species at risk listings usually occur several years after the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recommends a certain species is at some level of risk of extirpation. Recovery strategies, protection orders, and action plans for the majority of species listed under SARA are either issued well past legislated deadlines or not at all. AWA and partner conservation groups are at constant vigil and have found it necessary to turn to legal action in order to have SARA invoked.

Please refer to the Wildlife section for our work on these species at risk:

Woodland Caribou

Greater Sage-Grouse

Native Trout, including

 Westslope cutthroat trout

 Athabasca rainbow trout

 Bull trout

Wood and Plains Bison

LIMBER AND WHITEBARK PINE

Whitebark pine was added to the federal Species at Risk list in June 2012. AWA has also worked towards having limber pine receive the same status, which was also recommended by COSEWIC in 2014. Both species are listed as endangered provincially under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. A provincial recovery team has been established for both species, and AWA continues to monitor progress. An Alberta Whitebark Pine Recovery Plan 2013-2018 was released in 2014 and an Alberta Limber Pine Recovery Plan 2014 - 2019 was released in the fall of 2014.

OTHER SPECIES AT RISK

AWA continues to monitor and provide input on the progress of recovery processes for other wildlife, including proposed additions to the species listed under SARA. When the opportunity arises, AWA provides comments on proposed documents open for public consultation prepared under SARA.

In November 2016, AWA provided input into the development of several species at risk policies. These included policy on critical habitat protection on non-federal lands, policy on survival and recovery, policy regarding the identification of human structures as critical habitat, permitting, and listing policy. Overall, AWA has encouraged the government to develop policies that support the spirit and ultimate goals of SARA – namely, protection of species at risk – and not policies that allow for circumvention or misinterpretation of the act.

Under the SARA, one or more action plans must be created for a listed species under a certain timeline. In spring 2017, Parks Canada released a proposed multi-species action plan for Banff National Park, which includes 5 species: Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Woodland Caribou, Common Nighthawk, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Banff Springs Snail. AWA found this plan to be severely lacking in both urgency and detail and urged Parks Canada to revise the plan in several key sections, including identification of key critical habitat and providing resource and financial commitments. AWA previously provided comment on such a plan for Jasper National Park, which included seven species: Common Nighthawk and Olive-sided Flycatcher (birds), Haller's Apple Moss, Little Brown Myotis and Northern Myotis (bats), Whitebark Pine, and Woodland Caribou.



Common Nighthawk - Christyann Olson

PROTECTED AREAS PROGRESS

“What is needed now is a new era of economic growth – growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable.” This quote from the 1987 Brundtland Report, “Our Common Future,” still rings true thirty years later.

ALBERTA’S PROVINCIALY PROTECTED AREAS

Alberta’s protected areas network includes six federally-protected National Parks (Banff, Jasper, Waterton, Wood Buffalo and Elk Island) as well as a series of provincially-protected areas. The GoA’s *Alberta Land Reference Manual* provides data on the number and area of provincially protected areas.

New protected areas created through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan do not appear in the data set as they are still pending approval and they are listed at the bottom of the table. Section 7 land is a classification describing designation of lands to be managed under the Act that are not yet established as parks or recreation areas.

The Castle Provincial Park is 25,500 hectares in size: $246,864.92 - 221,363.92 = 25,500$ (see the 5th row of the table below). This includes the previous Lynx Creek Provincial Recreation Area (PRA), Castle Falls PRA, Castle River Bridge PRA, Syncline PRA and Beaver Mines PRA. The Castle Wildland Provincial Park is 79,738 ha.

<http://www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/library/land-reference-manual.aspx> is the source of the following data.

	Number	Number	Number	Hectares	Hectares	Hectares
Name	2017	2016	2015	2017	2016	2015
Wilderness Areas	3	3	3	100,988.79	100,988.79	100,988.79
Ecological Reserves	15	15	15	26,843.34	26,843.34	26,843.34
Wildland Provincial Parks	33	32	32	1,811,117.59	1,731,439.59	1,731,439.59
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	1	1	459,671.04	459,671.04	459,671.04
Provincial Parks	77	76	76	246,864.92	221,363.92	221,363.92
Provincial Recreation Areas	203	208	208	87,692.69	87,891.58	87,891.58
Heritage Rangelands	2	2	2	12,010.47	12,010.47	12,010.47
Natural Areas	139	139	139	129,943.98	129,943.98	129,943.98
TOTAL	473	476	476	2,875,132.82	2,770,152.71	2,770,152.71
Section 7 Land	10	10		1450.51	1450.51	1450.51
LARP Commitments not enacted	4	4	4	1,239,233	1,239,233	1,239,233
SSRP Commitments not enacted	3	3	3	137,735	137,735	137,735

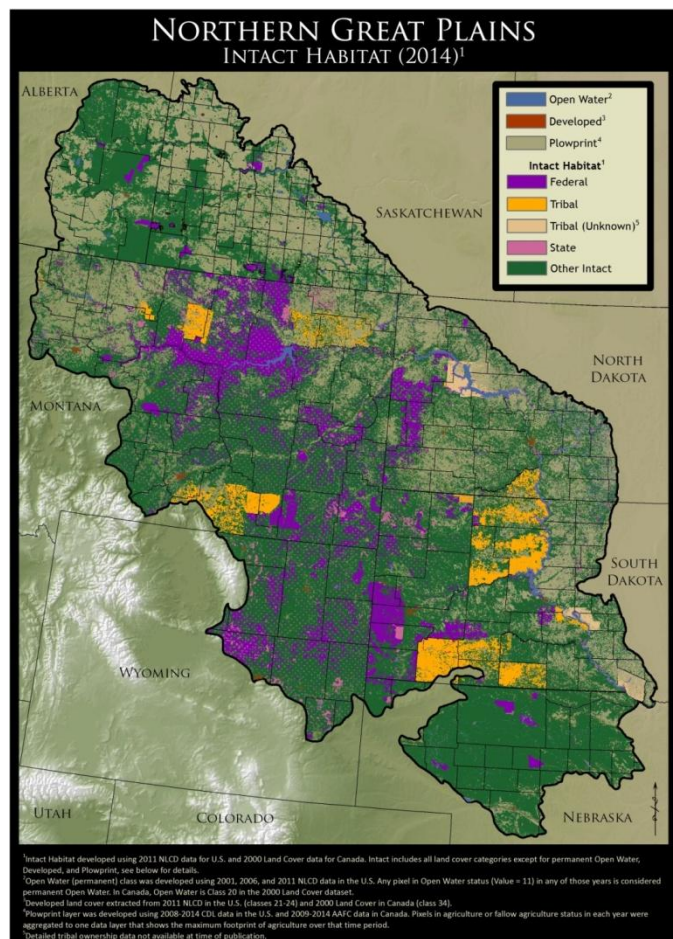
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

TEMPERATE GRASSLAND CONSERVATION

In an effort to increase the rate of progress in conserving and protecting temperate grasslands, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas created the Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force, now a Specialist Group, in 1996. This Specialist Group launched the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative (TGCI) in June 2008 at an International Grasslands Congress workshop in Hohhot, China in which AWA participated. The TGCI has described the state of the world's temperate grasslands and has supported various temperate grassland conservation initiatives. The mission of the TGCI is "To reverse the trend of biodiversity loss and degradation of temperate grasslands by promoting both the designation and special management of representative protected areas and the widespread use of sustainable management practices beyond protected area boundaries, with the goal of at least doubling the current level of protection by 2014." This work continues to build on various international programs as well as the Hohhot Declaration of 2008 which states: "...temperate grasslands are critically endangered and urgent action is required to protect and maintain the many valuable ecological services they provide." The TGCI hopes to assist grassland conservation by educating and influencing decision-makers responsible for temperate grassland management and protection. The TGCI is in the process of being revitalized and AWA will continue to participate in TGCI discussions on an ad hoc basis.

NORTHERN PLAINS CONSERVATION NETWORK (NPCN)

At 424 million acres, the Great Plains is likely the largest grassland ecosystem in North America and one of the largest in the world. The vision is to establish a sea of grass to support healthy wildlife populations and vibrant communities of people. NPCN believes that broad-scale restoration of this landscape will affirm that our society both recognizes this necessity and is progressive enough to implement this vision.



The network is strong, many of the founders are still engaged and acre by acre the conservation footprint on the high plains is growing. The network knows no political boundaries and works for greater understanding of the need to restore prairie grasslands and for on the ground habitat restoration results. For example, the American Prairie Reserve, formed as a result of the vision, acquires land to help the vision become reality.

NPCN members have long contributed to two main foci – bison and grassland birds. The bison initiative is moving forward and supporting efforts to place the bison on the tri-lateral conservation table made up of Canada, Mexico, and U.S. and assisting First Nations in realizing their vision for restoring healthy ecosystems and human communities. The grassland bird initiative has focused on best management practices. Sage-grouse continue to be one of the issues at the forefront as the US and Canada move forward with actions to protect this species throughout western North America. Working with other NPCN members, helped retain federal ownership of PFRA Pastures, including Govenlock, in SW Saskatchewan that are critical for species at risk recovery efforts. NPCN participants are working to get National Wildlife Area designation of Govenlock and long-term protection for other PFRA pastures that had been in the process of being transferred back to the Government of Saskatchewan for administration.

NPCN champions protection and appropriate management of the Onefour Research Station lands in SE Alberta. These lands are owned by the federal government which is proposing, without any consultation with the conservation community to transfer ownership to the GoA. These grasslands are some of the most extensive and diverse on the northern glaciated plains and – they are home to dozens of federally and provincially listed species of concern. AWA, NPCN and others are concerned about the future protection and management of the lands if they are owned by the GoA.

AWA hosts and maintains the website for the network at www.npcn.net

TRANSBOUNDARY GRASSLANDS WORKSHOP

The Transboundary Grasslands Workshop has been held twice and a third workshop is being planned for 2018. AWA has been represented at these workshops by Cliff Wallis. The workshops bring together government and non-government agencies, landowners and academia to discuss transboundary grassland initiatives across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana.

The workshops help all those concerned with grasslands conservation become familiar with the broad scope of work and accomplishments of large landscape conservation trans-boundary collaboratives. Workshop participants review the status of existing trans-boundary grassland initiatives and discuss existing jurisdictionally-based environmental, land use and natural resource management priorities and challenges. Identifying potential topics where new or enhanced trans-boundary collaboration may result in better outcomes is an important objective of the workshop initiative.

STRENGTH AND CAPACITY

Our members and supporters, people, are the force and means of the Alberta Wilderness Association. They are of utmost importance and throughout the province and around the World they are our eyes on wilderness areas in their regions. We depend on local contacts informing AWA staff of potential or active threats to Alberta's wild places and providing us with local information that may otherwise be inaccessible to us. There is no more important role for AWA than to ensure that our members and the public at large are informed on wilderness issues in a way that motivates people and leads to positive action to defend wild lands and wildlife.

We constantly evaluate operations, develop capacity, and reorganize based on strategic directions and conservation priorities. AWA is nimble in applying its resources, it renews its efforts with updated strategies and tactics to meet its mission. AWA is determined to continue to play a leadership role, build community partnerships, and focus on our grassroots connections.

Volunteers are crucial to our success. Volunteers help with on the ground protection of wilderness, office assistance, office and garden maintenance, and organization of and participation in events such as talks and hikes, benefit concerts, casino fundraising, the Climb and Run for Wilderness, and the Wild West Saloon.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS RESOURCE CENTRE

Wilderness Resource Centre archiving and cataloguing continued to move forward this year. Our on-line catalogue database is partially developed, and continued development and growth of the Electronic Wilderness Resource Centre (EWRC) has continued. Our objective is to have top of the line technology and storage capacity, is in place. This year we installed new network attached storage (NAS) for our main EWRC. We were able to replicate and replace existing data so AWA users now connect to an upgraded and faster unit. The older NAS unit is being used to develop AWA's media (EWRC-M). The unit also provides a third backup to our EWRC system. Identifying and removing duplicate files/images on EWRC-M is an ongoing challenge. As we continue to work on the media library, we will add tags, metadata and comments so categorization of files to assist when looking for a specific item.

We are routinely filing in the EWRC, building our collection and the historical records of wilderness in Alberta. We have routine external back up of the EWRC and paper filing is minimal as we have made a significant transition to electronic filing and storage. The electronic system facilitates ease of sharing and secure storage. The physical library is maintained by our volunteer librarian Linda Javeri and our electronic library upgrades are maintained by staff.

OUTREACH

WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

The Wild Lands Advocate (WLA) is AWA's news journal; it provides information and perspectives on Alberta's wilderness that will facilitate conservation through awareness and action. It is a crucial tool helping inform public debate in Alberta and inspiring others to care.

The journal reports news and information about the current, future and past work of AWA and its supporters. It tells the stories of Wild Alberta, and the people involved, through investigation and personal accounts in an easily read style. It provides timely, accurate, interesting, and useful information to AWA supporters and the general public by using news, stories, and perspectives on issues pertaining to Alberta's wilderness and AWA's work. AWA staff takes ownership and leadership for articles in the WLA. The WLA moved from six to four full colour issues annually; thereby reducing some costs and promoting online readership for those who are able. The editor of the WLA is Ian Urquhart.

ONLINE PRESENCE

AWA contracts the services of Build Studio, a professional web development company with usability expertise, to provide support and maintenance for its public interface. A significant upgrade to the AWA websites was completed in the fall of 2015. We have made good progress in maintaining content on the sites and believe these websites are key to our outreach work.

We have an electronic newsletter service that has eliminated difficulty in delivering important messages to members, supporters and those who have self-selected to be on the lists. AWA adheres to the Canadian Anti Spam Legislation.

AWA has two primary websites:

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca (major information and resource site)
www.ClimbforWilderness.ca (Earth Day event site)

and two single issue websites:

www.SavetheGrizzlies.ca
www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com

The three main list serve newsletters are:

General AWA News and Events 2167 addresses on this list
Media News 107 outlets on this list
Wilderness & Wildlife Defenders (folks who will take action, write letters, respond to issues; 646)

We also maintain lists that are specific to various campaigns and events.

AWA maintains a social media presence, with one Facebook page (user AlbertaWilderness), one Google+ profile, one Instagram profile (AlbertaWildernessAssociation) and two primary Twitter accounts (@ABWilderness and @Climb4Wild) in addition to various Twitter accounts maintained by individual staff members.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE DEFENDERS

AWA's Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Defenders program continues to give people the opportunity to have an active voice in some of the decisions being made that affect Alberta's wilderness and wildlife. Almost 650 individuals are contacted through AWA's online listserv. Throughout the year, alerts and information are sent out, often asking defenders to make a call or write a letter to help increase awareness. AWA regularly receives many copies of letters and emails sent by participants as part of this program.

HIKES AND TALKS PROGRAM

AWA's hikes are a strong program that continues to meet success in introducing the public to the natural beauty of wilderness areas, and helping fulfill the awareness aspect of AWA's mission. The hikes program is an important part of outreach as a means for keeping in contact with the local community that lives in and around AWA's areas of concern. It also has the effect of increasing interest in important areas less well known across the province and engaging hikers about AWA's conservation work. The spring and fall Whaleback trips are especially inspiring for people to learn about a successful conservation campaign and the resulting protected area. We incorporate a family day hike and an interpretive hike for new Canadians in our program this year. All hikes are well received and emphasize the natural values of the region visited. All of our outdoor programs are meant to emphasize the benefit of a healthy lifestyle and the benefits of a healthy environment for the people and the wildlife that depend on it.

The Tuesday Talks program in Calgary continues with excellent presentations that are well attended, creating opportunity to learn more about AWA's work and discuss a broad range of environmental topics throughout the province. With the support of the Wildbird General Store and Jackson Power, AWA hosted a third speaker series in Edmonton. We broadened our member base and plan to launch another series for fall 2017.

AWA participated in a variety of festivals, farmers markets and events with a display table which is an important part of achieving our goal of outreach and education about wilderness in Alberta. It gives AWA staff and volunteers an opportunity to meet Albertans of all ages and share our work with them as well as to hear their thoughts and experiences relating to Wild Alberta.

MUSIC FOR THE WILD

The ninth year of the Music for the Wild program continued, under consistent volunteer coordination by George Campbell, to attract a segment of the population that does not often get wide exposure to AWA's outreach and messaging. There were four Music for the Wild events during the 2016-2017 season all of which were very successful and often sold out. They offered an excellent venue for spreading conservation awareness. We look forward to a successful tenth year as George and his support volunteer Murray Little have agreed to continue the tradition.

SUMMER WILDERNESS DEFENDERS KIDS' CAMP

AWA's Wilderness Defenders Kids Camp program were a success for 2015 and 2016, educating and instilling a love of nature into a great group of youngsters. The day camp provided an excellent opportunity for children living in an urban area to explore several natural areas and gain an appreciation of the natural world in a fun, hands-on way. Throughout both weeks we covered a variety of topics. Field trips to Weaselhead Park and Cochrane Ecological Institute allowed the children to experience firsthand the complexities and beauty of natural landscapes and to share these experiences with their peers. They learnt the difference between native and non-native species and how humans have impacted native prairies. The children spent most days outside, being active and learning about being healthy, active and aware of a healthy environment. Each child prepared a project and presented what they had researched and learnt to their parents and AWA staff at the end of the week. They were eager to share their conservation messages with others at their schools and in their community.

As we planned for the 2017 outreach program season, we decided not to continue with the Kids Camps and instead develop other family oriented opportunities that meant there would be less concern and liability for AWA staff. The opportunity to re-evaluate will be made as planning for the 2018 season unfolds.



Volunteer Dave Mayhood with children from AWA's Wilderness Defenders Summer Camp exploring pond and stream invertebrates

Earth Day - Climb and Run for Wilderness

AWA's Annual Earth Day event was held on April 22, 2017 at The Bow Tower. The event challenges participants to climb 1,188 stairs and is held to increase public awareness of wilderness, wildlife and wild water in Alberta. It is also an important source of fundraising for AWA. The event has become well known for its unique level of energy and atmosphere.

A number of significant changes were made for the 26th *Climb for Wilderness*. These included:

- A new venue - the Bow Tower
- A greater emphasis on AWA's conservation work and much less emphasis on competition between athletes
- A greater emphasis on fundraising for AWA
- A new pricing structure which required a donation of \$75 per adult for a single climb
- Provision of the option of accurate timing for participants
- The change of venue necessitated the elimination of the mural competition, the Wild Alberta Expo and the run, all included in prior years

These changes were made to simplify and refocus the event.

The Bow is a spectacular venue for the event. In particular the climbers' destination, the 54th floor, has magnificent views as well as a beautiful interior with plenty of space for exhibits and entertainment.

The 2017 event attracted almost 900 participants and volunteers, about 24% less than the prior year.

The reduction was largely due to the elimination of the run component and the increased cost for participants. However, funds raised by AWA, less expenses, were 2.8% greater than the prior year. In

addition the event generated significant interest in AWA as participants who had completed their climb(s) roamed the exhibits on the 54th floor of the Bow.



We believe this event is a good opportunity for Calgary to strengthen its sense of community. It provides opportunities for people of every age, creed and race. It is focused on a healthy environment, biodiversity, and a wealth of clean abundant water, wildlife and wild spaces for all of us. The event provides a challenge and connects AWA with celebrations for Earth Day around the World.

COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the year, AWA participated in a wide range of community events, including conferences, workshops and talks. Examples include participation and attendance at various ENGO AGMs, planning meetings and forums, including North Saskatchewan, Bow River, Red Deer River and other watershed alliances; participation in Southern Foothills community meetings, presentations to school groups, various community groups, and more. AWA was active in the wider community, putting up displays at markets and specialized events. AWA also hosted a student practicum for a student from SAIT and another from St. Mary's University and completed numerous student requests for information and assistance. All of these events and activities are important outreach opportunities to engage with the community and raise awareness.

AWA'S COTTAGE SCHOOL

We are pleased to have received funds from the Canada 150 Western Economic Development Program that helps cover costs for the replacement of front entrance stairs and restoration of hardwood floors; the work was completed in September 2016, in time for the 2017 Canada 150 celebration

AWA's Cottage School has been a busy place this year with opportunities to host partners AGM's and programs.

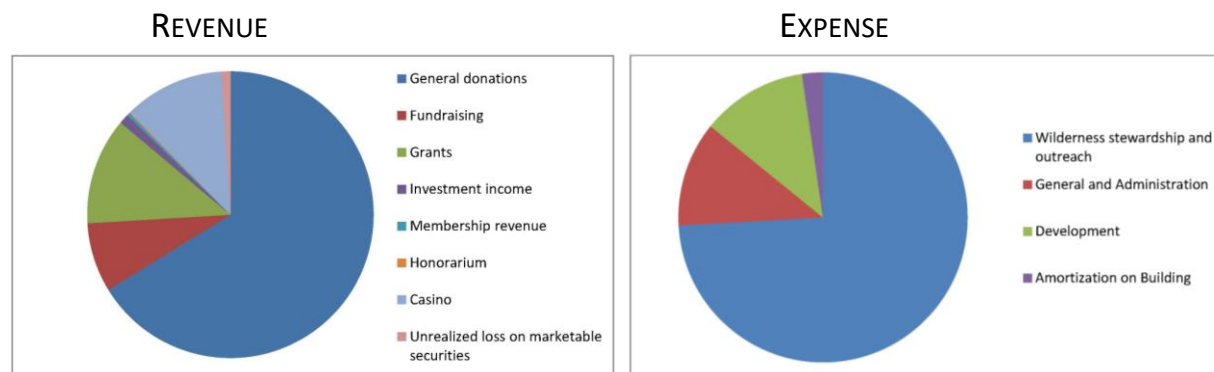
We have not charged rent for the use of the venue and provide an in-house staff member whenever guests are using the building.

Maintenance has been routine in this year, we did install rain barrels to capture rain from the roof and used it to keep flower beds and vegetables in our small plots watered. General maintenance and upkeep for the building is all we anticipate in terms of expense for some time to come. Routine maintenance and painting where needed is ongoing.



FINANCING WILDERNESS PROTECTION

Funds received from donations by members, supporters and fundraising efforts are vital to the health of AWA and provided 87% (2015-2016 - 92%) of our total revenue. Granting agencies in this year included Alberta Government Recreation and Physical Activity Division, ECO Canada, Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, Western Economic Diversification Canada 150 Infrastructure Program, Bow River Basin Council and The Calgary Foundation. Funding generated through events came from our annual Earth Day event Climb for Wilderness and the Wild West Saloon in the fall. Shell Canada, Enbridge Inc, and Imperial Oil provided sponsorship for the Wild West Saloon. A more detailed presentation thanking our corporate supporters who in large part provide in-kind support is listed on our website under the About Us, Supporters section. Fundraising and gifts from donors allow AWA to be financially independent and free to speak out for wilderness protection. We continue to work on our target to strengthen our financial reserve. We also realize the need to begin a fund for building maintenance and repair.



AWA devoted 77% (2015-2016 - 73%) of its cash expenditures to wilderness stewardship, conservation, and outreach. This includes funding the Alberta Wilderness Resource Centre. Development costs include expenses incurred in developing our core values, and creating broader awareness of the association and its mandate, "Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action." This category includes the cost of seeking more members and supporters as well as applying for grants. General and Administrative costs of 12% (2015-2016 -13%) represent an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism.

Our voting membership has grown in the past year and stands at 5,553 (2016 - 5342) individuals; representing 214 (2016 - 214) communities in Alberta, in addition to national and international members. We are always seeking new members and supporters.

REVIEW ENGAGEMENT REPORT

AWA engages Roberts and Company Professional Accountants LLP to conduct a review of AWA's financial statements each year. Their Review Engagement Report states that nothing has come to their attention that causes them to believe the financial statements are not, in all material respects, in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations. AWA's complete financial statements are posted on our website.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE LEGACY CIRCLE

AWA is dedicated to securing a more deliberate long-term approach to funding security. The elements that are required are in place and in time will provide AWA with a healthy reserve fund. The past two years have been more difficult in terms of donation amounts and sponsorship opportunities. We have sufficient reserve to help with the months when there is a decrease in cash flow and manage well.

BEQUESTS

It is the Board of Directors' hope that individuals, members, and supporters will make a bequest in their will naming a gift to AWA. Bequests to AWA will make a significant difference to our long-term security and our ability to plan for the future.

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE BEQUESTS

Daphne M. Smith 1980
Dr. James Birkett Cragg 1997
Anna Nowick 1999
Myrtle Muriel Koch 2001
Ian Ross 2003
Dorothy Barry 2003
William Mayer 2004
Diane Hughes 2005
Harold deVries 2009
Ann Roberts 2009
Richard Collier 2013
Harriet Ruth Mowat 2016
Kim Bennett 2016
Carol A. Haines - 2017
Wendy Williams - 2017
Herbert G. Kariel - 2017

LIFETIME GIVING

AWA works to recognize all donors and the lifetime giving and commitment they make to the association. All those donors who make cumulative gifts greater than \$20,000 are recognized on a plaque initiated for AWA's 45th anniversary and they are called Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors.

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE BENEFACTORS

(INDIVIDUALS WITH LIFETIME GIVING GREATER THAN \$20,000)

*Bruce and Eveline Goodall
Richard and Vivian Pharis
Chris Saunders
Joe Vipond and Family
Cliff and Terry Wallis
Christyann Olson
Rosemary Nation
Lorne Fitch
Anonymous*

*Dorothy Berry & the Berndt Family
Clint and Julie Docken
Chris and Ken Havard
Mary Kettenbach
Laura Jackson
Linda and Jusuf Javeri
Diane and Kevin Mihalcheon
Anthony and Liz Fricke
Donna Hammerlindl
Glen and Lois Mumey*

MEMORIAL TRIBUTES

Memorial tributes provide an opportunity to contribute to AWA's long-term funding security. As a further memorial and tribute to those who have been remembered with a memorial gift to AWA by their family and friends, we remember them here in our annual Report.

DONATIONS IN MEMORIAM 2016 - 2017

Orval Pall 1951-1986
David Manzer 1939-2010
Betty & Harry Horton
Roger Creasey 1953-2012
Sharon Tranter 1940-2013
P.K. Anderson 1927-2014
Christina Havard 1944 - 2015
Ron Wetherill 1940-2016
John (Jack) Olsen 1929-2016
Joyce Docken 1923-2016
Lindis Rachel Spurr 1935-2016
Emile Fauville 1929-2016
Knut Vik 1933 -2016
Brian McWilliam 1957-2016
Larry Frith 1943-2016
Ruth McPhee 1920-2016

Brent Dahl 1961 - 2016
Hugh Wallace 1941-2016
Martha Reisenhofer 1932-2016
Florence Gehman 1940-2017
Eleanor Hvizdos 1927-2017
Rodney Hatchard 1965-2017
Richard Koinberg 1946-2017
Peter Millward 1926-2017
Noreen Olinek 1931-2017
Max Winkler 1931-2017
Ruth Moir 1921-2017
Brian Staszewski 1951-2017
Herb Kariel 1927-2017
Lewis Ramstead 1935-2017
Spencer Dunford 1944-2017

RECOGNITION FOR OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUALS

AWA is honoured to receive throughout the year donations from friends and families made in honour of someone who was recognized for something outstanding they achieved or a difference they made. This year we received donations as tributes to the following:

Sean Nichols bicycle ride across Russia
Olivia Lingard donated her birthday money
Gus Yaki's Botany Walks
Raphael Slawinski's 50th Birthday
Alex & Lindsay
Joel Lipkind
Philip & Tristann Stopford
Gus Yaki's Canada 150th Prairie Walk

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust is a permanent endowment fund for Alberta's wilderness and we envision it can become an integral part of wilderness for tomorrow. We hope that carefully nurtured, the fund will grow over the generations to come. Years from today, that fund will continue to provide for the care and protection of Alberta's natural landscapes.

The Trust began in 1986 as a memorial fund established as a tribute to biologist Orval Pall. Throughout the years, families seeking to remember their own loved ones have found solace and strength in devoting resources to the memorial fund, which was dedicated to support the protection of wilderness in Alberta. On the fifteenth anniversary of the fund, AWA established the Trust as an endowment fund with the Calgary Foundation in order to help support the long-term sustainability of the Association. The Trust will support wilderness programs and research that contribute to the protection, understanding, and appreciation of wilderness, wild waters, and wildlife.

The fund balance has not grown significantly but is a tribute to numerous small donations from concerned individuals. The fund suffered with the economic downturn and today the balance is \$26,880 (2016 - \$25,269). The endowment fund's annual distribution \$1,097(2016 – \$1,011.00) is dedicated to the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture and the Wilderness Defender Awards.

Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Trust Guest Lecture

Each year in November, AWA hosts the *Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture*, given by a renowned guest speaker. Sponsored by the Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust, the Annual Lecture is an opportunity to present the ideas of researchers, writers or those active in a field related to conservation of wilderness or wildlife. The lecture is meant to challenge AWA as well as to inform those attending. AWA presents these lectures in pursuit of its mission “Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action.”

Martha Kostuch was considered an expert in consensus-based decision making and her work helped join groups that traditionally might not have worked together. She sought ways to make the system work so we could move forward. Kostuch was a “feisty, fine woman, who never hesitated to speak her mind.” When she recognized things weren’t right, she would fight very hard, tirelessly, to make sure that there was a change and that it would be better for all of us.

Kostuch, who died April 23, 2008, was a national leader, an Alberta Wilderness Defender and a woman who leaves a vital legacy. AWA has honoured her legacy and her memory by naming our annual lecture the *Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture*.

The 2016 lecture was given by Ray Rasmussen. Ray inspired a full house last November giving members an emotional and inspiring tour of Willmore Wilderness and years of exploration and dedication to wilderness in Alberta. An article, *Walking in Willmore: Ray Rasmussen’s Martha Kostuch Annual Lecture* was published in the June 2017 *Wild Lands Advocate*.

WILDERNESS DEFENDERS AWARDS

The Alberta Wilderness Defenders Awards are dedicated to individuals who have particularly inspired us with their love of Alberta’s wild lands, wildlife and wild water, and their efforts and achievements for conservation. AWA presents annual awards, to recognize such individuals.

These individuals have recognized that Alberta’s wilderness is among the most pristine in the world and cannot be taken for granted. They know that our wild places are the source of our health, wealth, and quality of life and that we must take an active role in their conservation. This year, the award was presented to Ray Rasmussen and Helene Walsh.

Ray’s contributions to protecting wild Alberta are as many and varied as the province’s landscapes. AWA, CPAWS, and Alberta Environmental Network are just some of the environmental organizations to benefit from Ray’s passion for the natural world. Professor Emeritus in the University of Alberta’s School of Business Ray championed the importance of sustainable development in a number of municipal and provincial advisory committees. His passion for Willmore Wilderness Park is boundless. Through his annual hikes into the Willmore he has introduced hundreds of hikers to the wonders of this special place.

Passion for the intrinsic values within Alberta’s immense boreal forests drove Helene’s career in conservation. Where some saw a timber resource, she saw teeming life and beauty, nature’s strength and fragility, grandeur and wildness. Helene’s work has boldly alerted governments, industry, and fellow environmentalists of the dire need to conserve the boreal forest. Although many Albertans care about intact landscapes, few act with Helene’s passion, persistence, intellect,

and energy. Her unwavering focus, partnered with a rational and diplomatic approach, is an inspiration. Although it cannot speak, we're certain the boreal and its biodiversity says, "thank you!".

GREAT GRAY OWL AWARDS

Like the great gray owl, with unending patience and dedication to purpose, these individuals work in quiet wisdom to conserve wilderness habitat and wild creatures. Our success is a reflection of the enduring commitment they have made to Alberta Wilderness Association.

2010 marked the launch of AWA's *Great Gray Owl Award*. Inspired in particular by three outstanding women and the significant contribution they have made over the past several years, this award will be presented annually as individuals meet the high standard of volunteerism, dedication and commitment of these inaugural award winners. Anne Fabris, Linda Javeri and Margaret Main were the 2010 recipients of the award. Ed Hergott, tireless supporter of our outreach program and events, received the award in 2011. Paul Sutherland and Nuno Fragoso were awarded the Great Gray Owl in 2013 and in 2014 we recognized Heather Crone. Bob Blaxley accepted our award in 2015 and in 2016 we were honoured to present the award to Heinz Unger.

Heinz Unger has truly been an AWA Great Gray Owl for a number of years. His support for staff through AWA's outreach programs has seen him as a hike leader, an ambassador at displays and presentations, a board member and past president and in the field as a researcher. He has made a significant difference. Always thinking, he challenges us and nurtures the best from us. His work on the Bighorn Trail Monitoring Program has spanned the entire time we have been making trips out to measure and monitor trail conditions on the Hummingbird system. His unwavering support has helped ensure the success of our monitoring program. Always willing to help where needed, we are thrilled to name Heinz as an AWA Great Gray Owl.

HOPE FOR TOMORROW

*Above all is the absolute certainty that we care and
we will take a stand and we will have
hope for tomorrow
because people care and
know the sanctuary and peace found
in wild spaces and wild things.*

- Christyann Olson



