

# Alberta Wilderness Association



Annual Report 2017 - 2018



Alberta Wilderness Association



# Wilderness for Tomorrow



AWA's mission to *Defend Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action* by inspiring communities to care is as vital and relevant as it ever was. Like all those who are dedicated to protecting our wild spaces and helping create a world where wild places, wildlife and our environment don't need protecting. You inspire the AWA team; your support in spirit, in person and with your financial gifts. We trust you will be inspired by the stories told.

- Christyann Olson, Executive Director

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Contributions to the Annual Report are provided by  
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Owen McGoldrick, Cliff Wallis and Chris Saunders

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# AWA - Another Year

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The conclusion of 2018 marks the end of another successful year for the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). From northern Alberta's boreal to the Rocky Mountains, the foothills, grasslands and parklands, AWA is making a difference. Highlights include the creation of excellent public lands videos and a road show to build awareness, tenacious advocacy for caribou range planning, participation in land use planning initiatives, pressure to protect endangered species and challenges of outdated public policy.

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 has 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.

At the end of our 2017 - 2018 year Dr. Joe Vipond concluded his three years of service with the board. He is moving on to launch a new group focused on climate change. During his time on the board, Joe has made significant contribution in a number of areas and we sincerely thank him for his efforts and expertise.

In January 2018 Jamie Jack, an AWA volunteer and supporter joined the board.

In closing I would like to thank Christyann Olson and her excellent team for another very strong year; they work tirelessly on key initiatives and new initiatives that present themselves. 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



# Board and Staff

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## 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 Joe Vipond, Calgary Jamie Jack, Calgary (joined the board in January 2018)
Director Emeritus:	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. The board is a governance board supporting the staff to achieve priorities and goals for the association. Their strength helps achieve AWA's mission. 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 Grace Wark, BSc (hired May 2018) Nissa Petterson, BSc (hired June 2018) Nick Pink, BSc (resigned March 2018))
Wild Lands Advocate Editor & Conservation Staff:	Ian Urquhart, PhD
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 diverse 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.*





# AWA

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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 and we believe in our ability to make a difference.

*“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*

## Mission, Vision, Values, Objectives

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### *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 210 Alberta communities, across Canada and around the world who care about protecting the province's wild places. There was reasonable membership growth this year and we plan to emphasize growth in youth memberships this coming 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 conserve 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.



# Conservation, Stewardship, Outreach

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## CONSERVATION

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

Critical ecosystems are in jeopardy. With less than 2% 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 true protection of the Castle Wildland Parks; native trout in jeopardy; threatened public lands and lack of access for the public; perennial issues for protecting sage-grouse; overdue caribou range plans; pressing for cumulative effects plans on our public lands, beginning with the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills; 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.



*Bodo Hills rough fescue parkland - a vital piece to protect – Photo © C.Olson*



# Wild Spaces – Areas and Issues of Concern

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*“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.

The 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.

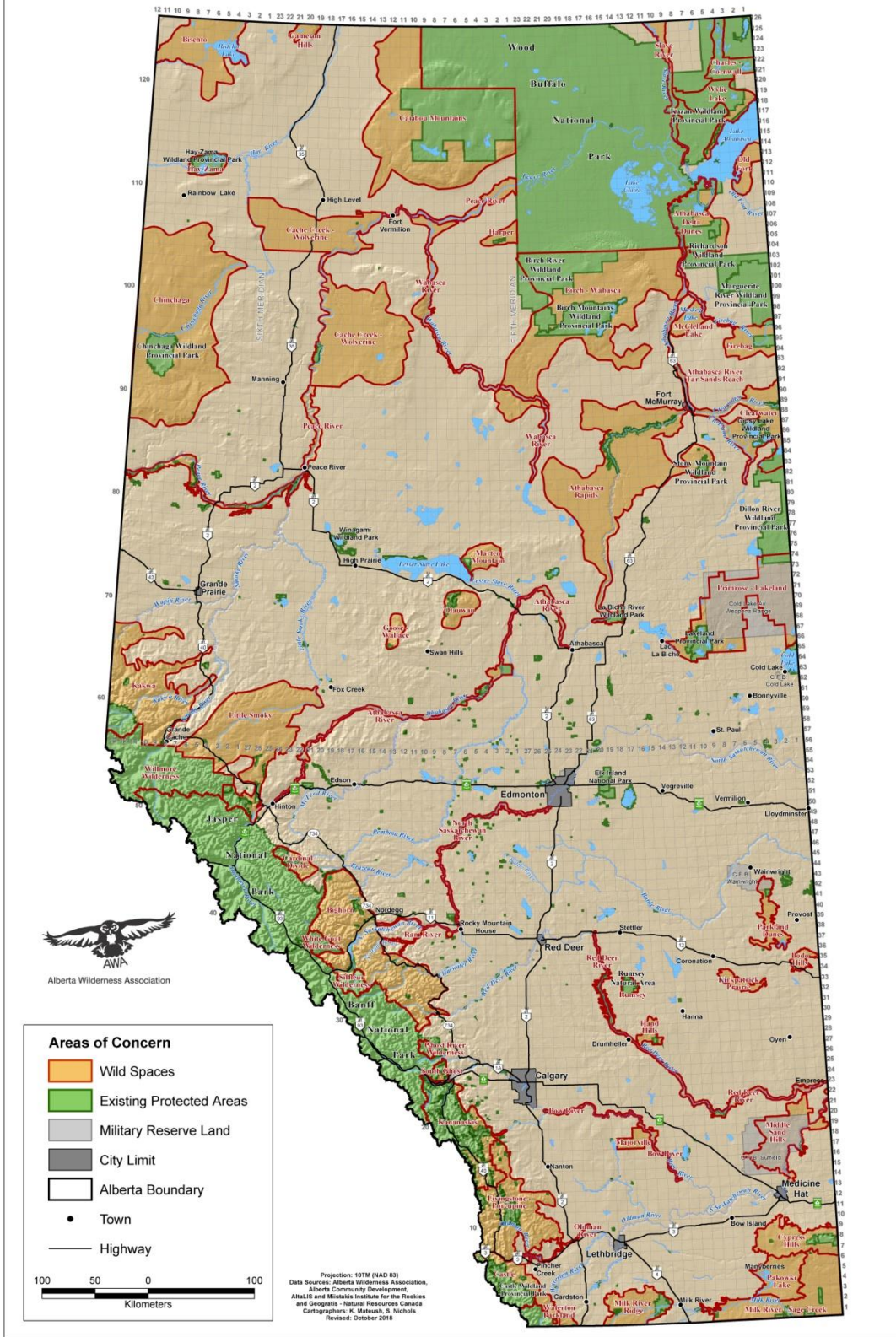
The Wild Alberta Map is shared regularly with colleagues in government, industry, and the environmental field to create a better understanding of critical ecological values and to recognize the significance of Alberta’s natural capital. It is perhaps one of our most effective educational tools.

In 2018, the map was redeveloped into an interactive webmap located within AWA’s Protected Areas webpage. The webmap is designed to highlight Alberta’s six Natural Regions, their total area, the amount of area within the Natural Region that is currently protected and what it would look like with the increased protections proposed by AWA’s Areas of Concern. As an example, please see the Grasslands maps featured below our recently updated Wild Spaces Map.

AWA has been able to remain current with state-of-the-art GIS technologies in our field work. A significant bequest from Herb Kariel in this fiscal year meant that we were able to invest in our mapping tools and we have dedicated our mapping work to his memory. Herb was a geographer and always reminded us of the value of a simple a map.



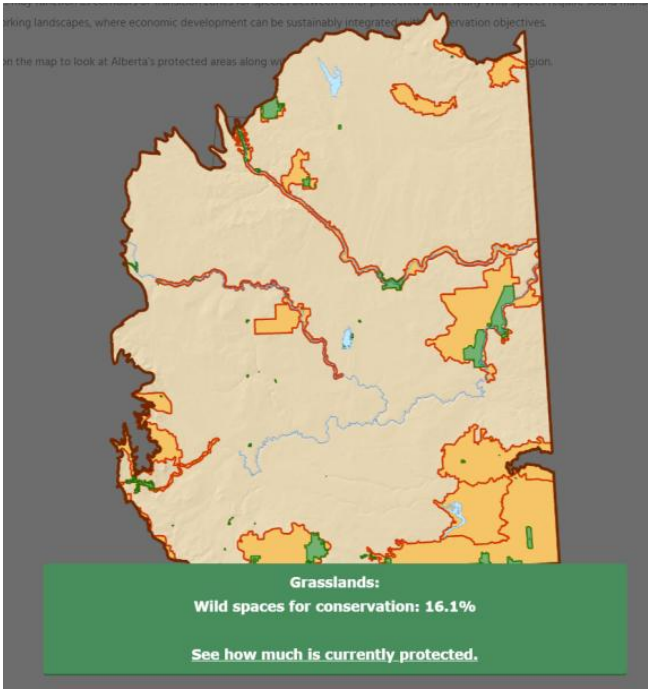
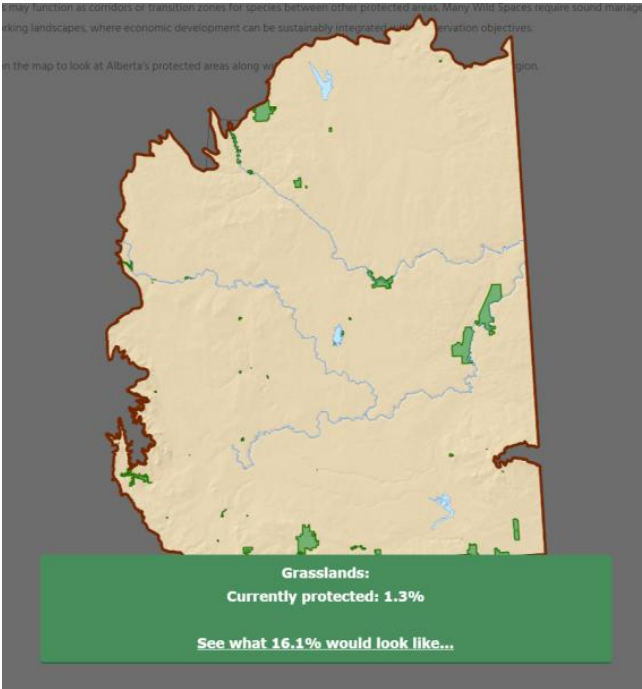
# Wild Alberta



Click on the map to look at Alberta's protected areas along with AWA's Areas of Concern within each natural region.



**Grasslands:**  
Total area: 95,565.7 km<sup>2</sup>  
Protected area: 1,228.9 km<sup>2</sup>  
Percent protected: 1.3%



# Areas and Issues of Concern

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## BOREAL REGION

### Primrose-Lakeland

Within northeast Alberta's boreal 'central mixedwood' subregion, this ecologically rich area has one of the highest concentrations of lakes in the province, as well as important intact older forests. It extends between Lac La Biche and Cold Lake, and includes the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range. AWA's vision for Primrose-Lakeland includes a significantly larger protected area, and strong management plans to retain and restore important habitat.

At the Alberta Lake Management Society's September 2017 conference in Lac La Biche, AWA presented on the history and opportunities of Lakeland protected areas. We also outlined concerns about fishing pressures on walleye and northern pike in northeast Alberta lakes. In October 2017, AWA presented on the 'lakes of Lakeland' to an international Forest Stewardship Council field tour group led by Alberta Pacific Forest Industries Inc. (AlPac). As part of that tour we also visited AlPac's field operations, pulp mill and several biodiversity research areas.

The threatened Cold Lake boreal woodland caribou population relies upon the Primrose-Lakeland area. AWA was a panelist at Treaty Six First Nations' Edmonton caribou forum in November 2017. Moderator Crystal Lameman of Beaver Lake Cree Nation outlined how caribou are integral to their fundamental rights as well as their rights under Treaty, and Elder Brian Grandbois of the Cold Lake First Nations spoke about the importance of caribou to his own and neighbouring communities.

The Alberta government reported that Alberta's Cold Lake caribou range was 87% disturbed by human footprint as of late 2017, mainly due to historic seismic lines and other energy infrastructure. AWA has praised Cenovus' innovative habitat restoration work in this area, and the new Dillon Wildland Provincial Park that protects 5% of this caribou range, but much more is needed. Solutions are possible: significant roadless portions of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range could be protected. Indeed Saskatchewan has provided protection on its side of the Range. Forestry disturbance and active energy infrastructure could be aggregated, and larger disturbed habitat areas could be restored. Since May 2018, AWA has closely followed and supported the progress of a Cold Lake caribou working group, which includes Cold Lake First Nations, industry and ENGOs. The group is modelling improved land use options for caribou in the area.

Meanwhile, more caribou habitat continues to be disturbed by industry. In November 2017 and March 2018, Ecojustice wrote Environment and Climate Change Canada Minister McKenna on behalf of AWA, Cold Lake First Nations and David Suzuki Foundation to request that the critical habitat protection provisions in the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* be applied for five northeast Alberta caribou populations, including Cold Lake. In explaining why they were partners in the request, Cold Lake First Nations Chief and Council stated: "Cold Lake First Nations sides with the caribou. If the caribou can survive on the land then so can we." We requested that the Minister recommend an interim SARA habitat protection order. We suggested this order could prohibit new industrial disturbance in these ranges only until such



time as Alberta completes legally enforceable caribou range plans that achieve and maintain the minimum 65% undisturbed habitat threshold. In May 2018, Ecojustice wrote Minister McKenna on behalf of these same groups, plus the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Mikisew Cree First Nation, pointing out that the need persists for interim protection of caribou critical habitat during the ongoing negotiations on federal-provincial caribou ‘conservation agreements’.

### McClelland Lake

The McClelland Lake wetland complex is located 85 km north of Fort McMurray, upstream of the globally significant Peace-Athabasca Delta. It is an outstanding wetland complex at the edge of the tar sands mineable region. Its lake and wetlands are significant natural fresh water bodies along the Lower Athabasca River valley’s major North American migratory flyway, providing a stopover area and breeding grounds for many bird species. Its large groundwater-fed patterned fens are strikingly beautiful, featuring long rows of treed peat ridges separated by shallow water pools. AWA’s vision is for the entire 330 km<sup>2</sup> McClelland watershed to be designated a Provincial Park, with its two patterned fens designated Ecological Reserves.

In September 2017, over 120 birds died from landing in toxic tailings ponds during the start-up phase of Suncor’s Fort Hills oil sands mine. In response, AWA called for protection of nearby McClelland Lake wetland complex as a migratory bird sanctuary, and for stronger tailings management measures.

The primary threat to McClelland watershed is from direct mining activity in a later phase of the Fort Hills mine. To receive approval to mine the upper McClelland watershed, Suncor must demonstrate how it will maintain water levels, flows and chemistry in the unmined half of the McClelland patterned fen. The proposal to date is to bury a large wall to sever water connections, and then pump water into the lower, downstream portion of the wetland complex while destroying the upper half with an open pit bitumen mine. AWA is following this regulatory process to ensure that rigorous conditions are upheld, to prevent the disastrous impacts to the lake and wetland complex that we are convinced will follow from destruction of the upper watershed.

AWA participated in several oil sands wetlands monitoring expert groups in late 2017. We presented on the importance of protecting oil sands region peat wetlands generally, citing the outstanding McClelland wetlands in particular. We continue to call for reforms to Alberta’s weak wetland policy that exempts almost all oil sands projects from having to replace lost wetlands, thereby facilitating extensive wetland destruction in the mineable oilsands area along the Lower Athabasca River valley.

### Hay-Zama

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 km<sup>2</sup>) became 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 diverse complement 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 1960's.

As an active member of the Hay-Zama Committee (which includes representatives from the Dene Tha' First Nation community, government, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and the energy industry) AWA helped see the oil and gas industry meet their commitment to complete their extraction activities three years ahead of schedule and begin reclamation. Considerable work remains to re-establish the ecological integrity of the area.

AWA continues to work with the Committee and to ensure that reclamation proceeds on schedule despite the financial challenges. AWA promotes the Hay-Zama Committee's consensus-based, collaborative process as a model for phasing out industrial activities within protected areas. In a November 2017 AWA talk on issues facing caribou, the Hay Zama agreement and committee was cited as a vital collaboration model for what is possible.

In accordance with the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding, twinning Hay-Zama Lakes with Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), AWA continues to press the Government of Alberta to honour its commitments to the Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve. Staffing issues within the provincial government, 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. In the coming year, we are hopeful that we may see a long overdue celebration of the Hay-Zama Committee's successes and the end of oil and gas extraction in the complex.

## Peace River Valley

The Peace River Valley is one of the most diverse and productive river valleys in the Parkland and Boreal Forest regions of Canada. A nationally significant waterway that supplies water to the Peace-Athabasca Delta in Wood Buffalo National Park, the Peace is 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 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 also provides important habitat for migratory birds and resident moose, elk and deer.

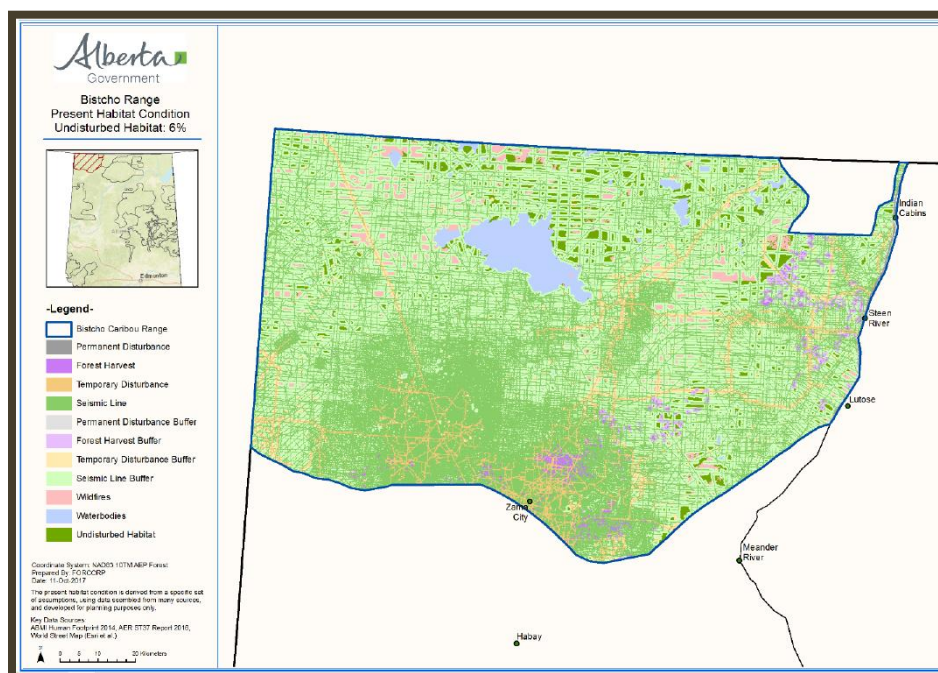
Following the 2015 cancellation of TransAlta's Dunvegan dam project a group of financiers proposed the Amisk hydro project in the summer of 2015. The project proposes a 24 metre high dam across the river about 15 kilometres upstream from the Dunvegan Bridge. This would create a 77 kilometre long headpond, 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 and the project will receive a joint federal-provincial review. AWA continues to monitor the progress of the project and awaits the submission of Amisk's Environmental Impact Assessment, which is due in 2019.



Researching historical records of fish populations in Peace River would provide an important benchmark to measure and predict the disturbance to fish population caused by current dams and proposed new developments. If it exists, the information is difficult to locate and we hope to have better success finding this important baseline data in the coming year. AWA is part of the 'Friends of the Peace River Valley' coalition working to maintain water flows and important river corridor habitat. We work to create greater awareness of the proposals and their impacts with environmental groups and local citizens

## Bistcho

The Bistcho region is in the far northwestern corner of Alberta. Parts of it remain a remote and serene wilderness, while other parts have been fragmented by energy industry disturbance. The area is a diverse subarctic wetland, extremely sensitive to human activities. At 426 km<sup>2</sup>, 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 supports northern pike, walleye, and whitefish. The threatened Bistcho boreal woodland caribou population relies on this landscape and its connectivity to adjoining BC and NWT caribou ranges. According to the Alberta government, the Bistcho caribou range was 91% disturbed by human footprint as of late 2017, mostly from historic seismic line disturbance.



Bistcho currently has no protected areas. AWA continues to ask Alberta to uphold its June 2016 commitment to permanently protect Forest Management Unit (FMU) F20, an 8700 km<sup>2</sup> area with no forestry tenure, to benefit caribou and other valued wildlife. In August 2017, at a caribou open house hosted by Mackenzie County and the town of High Level, AWA advocated the F20 unit as a caribou protected area, because of the low cost and significant benefits from restoration.

In summer 2018, AWA, David Suzuki Foundation and Harmony Foundation commissioned Dr. Tom Power, an eminent natural resource economist, to study the economic impact of restoring woodland caribou in the Bistcho and nearby Yates caribou ranges. Power's October 2018 study

concluded that managing lands for caribou recovery can grow the economy in these ranges. Land use choices for both caribou and the economy can be found that value important ecological, cultural and commercial concerns. A reasonable seismic line restoration program could generate 100 direct jobs a year for almost 20 years, which would be a solid regional employment opportunity. AWA is supportive of this proposal and will continue to propose that protecting most of F20, and allowing some parts of it to remain as strictly-managed energy development zones, would be an example of optimizing a range plan for caribou recovery as well as building local communities.

In autumn 2018, the Dene Tha First Nation proposed an Indigenous Protected Area over a large portion of F20, which would include Dene Tha co-management. AWA will encourage this proposal to protect and restore valuable wildlife habitat and support Indigenous uses and cultural practices on these lands.

## Chinchaga

With diverse forests and wetlands, the Chinchaga Area of Concern represents a haven of boreal highlands in northwestern Alberta. AWA believes the ecological integrity of the Chinchaga boreal highlands must be maintained and restored to serve as a vital climate refuge for woodland caribou and other boreal forest wildlife. The threatened Chinchaga boreal woodland caribou population relies upon this landscape and its connectivity to adjacent BC caribou range lands. According to the Alberta government, their home range was 97% disturbed by human footprint as of late 2017, mostly from historic seismic line disturbance. Critical caribou habitat continues to be destroyed or degraded by industry in the absence of limits to surface disturbance.

AWA is seeking solutions to recover Chinchaga's wild spaces and sensitive wildlife while valuing community economic concerns. Extending permanent protection to the P8 FMU north of the existing 800 km<sup>2</sup> Chinchaga Wildland Provincial Park would expand the Park fivefold, with no impact to regional forestry and minimal impact to energy leases. The Alberta government committed to this protection in June 2016, and in December 2017 it proposed this FMU as a candidate protected area, but it has not yet followed through. There could be areas of current and future commercial activity in the caribou range compatible with caribou recovery, where clustering and reducing infrastructure disturbance will be essential. As well, there are new local employment opportunities from reclaiming historic seismic lines and abandoned wells, which would also renew the landscape's capacity to support wildlife, store water and carbon, and be resilient to climate change.

In August 2017, AWA presented on the low cost of a P8 caribou protected area, and on restoration benefits, at a caribou open house hosted by County of Northern Lights in the town of Manning. We published interactive maps in October 2017 showing recent disturbance 'hot spots' in Chinchaga caribou range. The maps powerfully spotlight ongoing habitat decline and government inaction over the five years since the federal boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy was released. The October 2018 Bistcho-Yates economic study, commissioned by AWA and two ENGO partners, points out optimal approaches to recover caribou and support economic activity; these findings also apply to Chinchaga (see Bistcho and Caribou sections for more details). Although we are disappointed with the lack of concrete action, AWA remains engaged and is working to see better protection as well as caribou range planning implemented with urgency.



## Caribou Mountains

Caribou Mountains Wildland Park (5,910 km<sup>2</sup>) 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. The park is also home to wood bison with approximately 120 individuals residing in the Wentzel Lake area.

Due to the area's isolation, and lack of good biological information, AWA believes the Caribou Mountains are vulnerable to exploitation. The area contains substantial damage 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 working to finalize the draft management plan for the Wildland Park and submitted extensive suggestions to support maintaining the area in its relatively undisturbed state. As of August 2018, despite assurances, the draft management plan has still not been produced.

The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2004/5 - 2013/14 notes the area has been 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 supported a recommendation made by an Alberta government appointed mediator for woodland caribou range management to permanently protect the 6,000 km<sup>2</sup> 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 significant 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 Government of Alberta 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. No action has been taken by the government to implement the mediator's recommendations for protection.



## ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

AWA's efforts in seeking legislated protection of our Eastern Slopes wildlands and security for our headwaters have remained largely the same since our 1977 submission to the Eastern Slopes Hearings and our resulting *Eastern Slopes Wildlands* book. Some parts of the Eastern Slopes remain with very little real protection, constant pressure coupled with efforts to create better awareness is needed. We are engaged throughout the Rocky Mountain Region and continue to advocate for legislated protection that considers the water, wildlife, and sustainable recreation value this area provides.

### Willmore Wilderness Park

At more than 4,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Willmore Wilderness Park is a magnificent part of Alberta's protected areas network. Designated a park in 1959 by the provincial government, the 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 an 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 seem to place little value on true wilderness. There is an ever-present push for fixed roof structures and routes to make access within the park easier.

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. A management plan for the Willmore Wilderness Park, as the foundation underlying any future developments in the park is needed. 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.

AWA is 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.

In 2017, AWA was told that there was a reasonable chance that a Willmore Wilderness Park management plan could be produced in 2018. A management plan that provides true protection of the pristine wilderness status of Willmore Wilderness Park is long overdue and at the time of this report no draft management plan has been produced.

### 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 area of wilderness. Coal mining in this area, as in other parts of Alberta, has gone through numerous boom and bust cycles and there have been a number of different operators. 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. CST Canada Coal Company has purchased the mine, and all permits, licences, leases and approvals have been transferred. The mine began operations mid 2018 and mining of the No. 8 mine surface operation is on-going. AWA met with representatives of CST and GCC in March of 2018 and was able to emphasize outstanding concerns about No. 12 Mine North especially because adjacent Caw Ridge is an important wildlife area that needs to be protected.

In December 2017 the Alberta government released its draft Caribou Range Plan which emphasized the need to recover caribou populations to a self-sustaining state, but also allowed for ongoing surface disturbances by the forest and energy sectors. AWA believes the draft Range Plan could increase the rate of extinction of Woodland caribou by not prioritizing 65% of undisturbed habitat over industrial developments. Solutions are within reach to protect vital caribou habitat while supporting economic development within appropriate areas throughout the province and yet the government has not taken steps to implement range plans.

### 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. The endangered Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou populations are, at best, barely stabilized by a twelve year wolf cull by the Government of Alberta. AWA believes the cull 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 for the long-term protection and restoration of the Little Smoky. We continue to seek strict total disturbance limits and the end of in-range logging. We believe solutions to the fear of economic loss for local communities include: sharing timber allocations outside these small and highly fragmented west central Alberta ranges; clustering energy surface disturbance into a reduced, optimized infrastructure network; and expanding the pilot seismic line habitat restoration to provide local jobs and economic stimulus.

In August 2017, we highlighted local trappers' concerns of extensive new oil and gas disturbance in formerly intact caribou areas, and met in September 2017 with Jupiter Resources to discuss



these concerns. In September 2017 we also participated about caribou range discussion panel before a large audience in Whitecourt. On the same visit to the area we also discussed caribou and economic concerns with several Alberta Newsprint Company managers while touring their newsprint facility.

In December 2017, AWA responded to the Alberta Government's release of its draft Provincial Woodland Caribou Range Plan by asking for a government commitment to actually meet minimum caribou habitat needs, and for the government to provide complete site-specific range plans. In February and March 2018, AWA was a delegate to Alberta government multi-stakeholder workshops that discussed potential scenarios for the Little Smoky, A La Peche and other west central ranges. We continue to engage with both provincial and federal decision makers and planners about the need to adopt 'optimized' plans that protect and restore at least the minimum caribou habitat requirements, while seeking cost effective and beneficial solutions to communities.

## Bighorn

The Bighorn Wildland has been a high priority for AWA since the organization's earliest days in the 1960s. 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 asking 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, our staff, and our extensive field work.

The Bighorn Wildland consists of a 5000 km<sup>2</sup> pristine wilderness area that AWA proposes would be best protected as a Wildland Provincial Park. Within the Kiska/Wilson PLUZ and adjacent public lands east of the Bighorn, AWA would support the establishment of Public Land Use Zones (PLUZs) and undertaking sub-regional planning initiatives, which would establish motorized and non-motorized trail systems and manage industrial development to a high standard in appropriate areas while protecting critical bull trout spawning areas and other key conservation values.

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

In 2018 the provincial government released recommendations made by the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) in 2014. AWA believes that the NSRAC recommendations fall short of the protection that is needed for the Bighorn Wildland and must include, at minimum, those areas promised for protection by the Alberta government since 1986.

## Trail Monitoring

From 2003-2017 AWA made comprehensive visits to the Ram/Clearwater trail system which is designated for off-road vehicle use. We have documented damage to the trail system, and have found ongoing illegal use, fragmentation of this wilderness landscape, impacts on wildlife, and associated erosion and sedimentation from numerous crossings of streams by vehicles. In 2018, AWA conducted two trips to download data from TRAFx units buried at strategic points along



the trail system. The TRAFx units are used to monitor and document the amount of vehicle traffic on the trails.

Findings since AWA's last report in 2012 are currently being analyzed and AWA anticipates the release of a final report in the coming fiscal year. AWA continues to reiterate that the topography, soil, and vegetation of the region are not able to withstand motorized recreation.

AWA would like to thank our dedicated volunteers have been involved in this project throughout the past 15 years, in particular Paul Sutherland and Heinz Unger. Without them, this monitoring work would have not been possible.

### **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.

In September 2017, AWA staff and volunteers conducted a 5 day backcountry trip whose purpose was to undertake maintenance on a 3km segment of the trail within the George Greek drainage and to scout other sections for future maintenance. Five participants hiked in from the Blackstone Gap and met up with 2 others, coming by horse from the Wapiabi Gap. The participants were assisted by helicopter dropped supplies and tools, courtesy of Alberta Environment and Parks.

AWA has confirmed the need to complete reconnaissance work on the remainder of the trail and is currently investigating opportunities to collaborate with other volunteer organizations to continue maintenance of the Bighorn Historic Trail.



*Bighorn Historic Trail – rich forests and moist valley bottoms – Photo © J. VanRiper*



## SOUTHERN EASTERN SLOPES REGION

The Crown of the Continent is a crucial mountain and foothills ecosystem spanning corners of southwest Alberta, southeast British Columbia and northwest 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. The 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, and the Castle.

The *Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow Campaign*, 2015 - 2016 led to a communiqué created and signed by almost 70 individuals and groups. It remains a vital resource providing a benchmark for protection of our headwaters. Three main principles formed the core of the communiqué:

- Ban OHVs from protected areas in Alberta's Eastern Slopes 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.

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 continue being tireless in efforts to raise awareness and speak up for responsible land management decisions in Alberta's Eastern Slopes.

### South Ghost Wilderness Area - Ghost-Waiparous

Wilderness, wildlife, and water quality and quantity are essential values of the South Ghost Wilderness Area and in the Ghost-Waiparous that forms a transition zone for the South Ghost area. Expansion of the adjacent Don Getty Wildland Park was promised in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) and has not been implemented.

AWA works with Stop Ghost Clearcut and the Ghost Watershed Alliance Society (GWAS) to increase awareness of the lawless behaviour and unchecked OHV activities that has become prevalent in the Ghost-Waiparous area. In May 2017, the Alberta government added some enforcement capacity in the Ghost-Waiparous area. The additional 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. GWAS released its comprehensive report, the State of the Watershed in April 2018; this will provide an important benchmark and reference for planning and establishing priorities.



The Back Country Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program (BTFRP) work in this region has included rerouting motorized recreation trails and building bridges to minimize impacts to westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat. GWAS has engaged experts including Dave Polster to conduct workshops that included field experience in creating rough and loose barriers on popular river crossing sites with willow and tree planting by the community action group. The trails themselves contribute increased sediment delivery to streams, habitat fragmentation, and stresses to wildlife. Some progress with closure of water crossing areas is being made. AWA believes the ecosystem must be considered first and only then is it appropriate to see where recreation can fit. Vital natural ecosystems, including the security of our headwaters and our watersheds must be protected.

### **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 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. The trends of increasing development and commercialization in our National Parks and gateway communities such as Canmore are likely to lead to disaster for wildlife. Local citizen groups have taken a strong role in defending the wildlife and the need for protection of wildlife corridors. AWA supports them in their work.

The May 2017 decision by Canmore Town Councillors to reject the Three Sisters Mountain Village (TSMV) Resort Area Structure Plan (ASP) amendment meant there will be no change to the 2004 ASP that leaves land around the golf course undeveloped as part of the wildlife corridor through the Three Sisters area. The decision supports the requests of a number of environmental organizations and individuals who have struggled throughout the years to have the value of this wildlife corridor recognized and protected for many years. AWA has worked to oppose the proposed development and squeezing of the corridor with BowCORD since we both intervened at the 1992 hearings into the original development application.

Early in 2018 Canmore residents complained about the quality and neutrality of a survey by Town Council seeking input regarding the Town of Canmore the possibility of hosting part of the 2026 Olympic Games. Environmental concerns associated with holding the games in sensitive landscapes have been the focus of AWA's response to whether there is support for the 2026 Olympic Winter Games application.

In April 2018, the Alberta Government Environmental Assessment Director deemed the Environmental Impact Assessment report complete for the Town of Canmore's Cougar Creek Debris Flood Retention Structure. Of particular note is that the review of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) took 85 weeks.

### **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. This year is the 40th anniversary of the



designation of Kananaskis Country. A designation that created controversy and tough debate at the time but is today a jewel that people fiercely defend and crave for its wildness.

AWA's vision for Kananaskis is that further commercial and industrial development, including forestry operations, will be halted until a scientifically-based ecosystem management plan has been developed. Our vision includes the long overdue enhanced designation of Evan-Thomas Provincial Recreation Area as a provincial park and the development of sustainable, small-scale ecotourism economies for Foothills gateway communities. We recognize Kananaskis will reach visitor carrying capacity and it will be very difficult to effectively manage human-wildlife conflict. Ecological integrity will be significantly compromised without plans that consider the ecosystem and wildlife values that make this area so popular. Albertans love and appreciate our protected areas network and protection of the segments of Kananaskis without formal designation is long overdue.

AWA is a steward for Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve in Kananaskis Country. Stewardship work includes recording observations, installing signs and removing debris and garbage. 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. A lack of urgency for proper signage means inappropriate uses continue.

Under the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), a number of areas promised for designation as new or expanded protected areas within Kananaskis Country have not been implemented.

In October 2017, AWA wrote to Alberta's Minister of Environment and Parks to comment on the proposed redevelopment of the Lower Kananaskis River Barrier Lake Day Use Area in Bow Valley Provincial Park. AWA supported plans to contain new development to existing areas of disturbance, and for expanding provisions to facilitate the wildlife corridor running through the area. However, AWA expressed concern about the increasing urbanization surrounding the Barrier Reservoir Day Use area, as it runs the risk of losing its wilderness values entirely. The government recently announced their final decision which omitted some of the more disruptive developments that had been proposed, including the comfort camping stations in Canoe Meadows. We're pleased AWA's comments were considered in the planning process for this popular recreation area.

Throughout the past year AWA worked with Dave Mayhood and Logan Boyer to complete a study of the sedimentation in McLean Creek. The paper *Erosion & Suspended Sediment Delivery from Off-Highway Vehicle Trails & Roads in the McLean Creek Watershed, Alberta* has been reviewed and will be released soon. The study, supported with funding from Bow River Basin Council concluded that OHV trails and the McLean Creek Road create sufficient total suspended solids (TSS) to seriously harm fish populations, even to the extent of eliminating some of them. The report suggests that TSS loading to the Elbow River by McLean Creek, largely attributable to OHV trails and roads, is sufficiently high to warrant further investigation to determine its effects on downstream water quality and treatment. The government needs to deal with the outstanding problem of motorized recreationists crossing streams and creating trails that deliver large amounts of sediment to streams. The findings of this research will and have already helped increase knowledge of the issues.



## Castle Wildland Park and Castle Provincial Park

Since the September 2015 announcement of the Castle Parks, a great deal of committee work and consultation has led to the development of a management plan given approval in May 2018.

AWA believes the final Castle plan reflects concerns raised in the consultation process and the wishes of Albertans to see this region protected. The plan commits to the phase-out of summer off highway vehicle (OHV) use in the parks; as of the summer 2018, OHV use has been effectively removed from the Wildland Provincial Park. However, the plan commits to the ongoing use of snowmobiles in the park, stating “because of the relatively lower impact of winter OHV use, this activity will be permitted.” Our reviews of this activity suggest significant impacts remain. Winter is a particularly stressful time for many animals as they cope with lower food availability and higher metabolic demands. Snowmobiles can cause increased stress levels as well as displacement and changes in animal behaviour. The final concerns surround ensuring these parks retain and protect the wilderness values that make them so special. Responsible grazing practices, restoration of areas damaged through industrial and recreational use and avoidance of the commercialization of these parks are the focus of AWA's concern going forward.

Long time and well known advocate Charlie Russell passed away in May 2018. A lifelong defender of the Castle Wilderness and internationally recognized advocate for grizzly bears, his strong and soft spoken respect for bears was based in his mantra, *bears are not the problem, humans are.*

## Livingstone-Porcupine

Ongoing industrial-scale logging and motorized recreation in sensitive watersheds continue to be major concerns for AWA in the Livingstone-Porcupine. There are also new threats to the area in the form of renewed coal development and pollution from earlier coal mining activities that require ongoing investigation and responses.

The Porcupine Hills Coalition formed in 2015 by concerned individuals, organizations (including AWA) and municipalities has expanded to include 40 signatories. 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 Coalition met regularly with government planners throughout the process of Land Footprint Management Planning (LFMP) and Recreation Management Planning (RMP) in the area and in spring 2018, both plans were finally released by the Government. These final plans require various ministries, industries, and decision-makers to co-operate and achieve better public lands management. The creation of two new Public Land Use Zones (PLUZ), one in the Livingstone and another in the Porcupine Hills, added important enforcement strength to the plans. The establishment of PLUZs provides designated trail systems for off-highway vehicles, along with clear guidance for both motorized and non-motorized users. It also provides enforcement officers with the tools to better enforce regulations governing illegal activities on these lands.



Not all of AWA's concerns are addressed in the final plan. Notably, despite AWA's concerns, the motorized trail system crosses westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat in a number of locations. These trails will contribute to the continued degradation of critical habitat since the runoff from the trail system allows significant amounts of additional sediment into creeks. As AWA has noted time and time again, the destruction of critical habitat is illegal under the Species at Risk Act. We believe strict avoidance of critical habitat is required to honour the government's legal obligation to recover westslope cutthroat trout.

Land use planning continues in the Livingstone-Porcupine with the development of the Biodiversity Monitoring Framework (BMF); completion of the BMF is required within a year under the LFMP. The BMF is urgently needed to manage the cumulative impacts of human spatial footprint (including clearcuts and former coal mines) on the landscape. The proposed new Grassy Mountain Coal Mine is located within AWA's Livingstone-Porcupine Area of Concern and AWA continues to be involved with the review of this proposed project (see Energy – Coal for further information).

During this year AWA wrote once again to express concerns over ongoing damage to land in the Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park (WPP). Since the 2016 closure of certain motorized trails within the Bob Creek WPP due to the ongoing deterioration of sensitive native trout habitat, inadequate measures have been put in place to ensure motorized vehicles remain out of sensitive areas. We are waiting for a response to our latest letter and remain disappointed that the proper closure and recovery of motorized trails has not been dealt with.



*Lichen crusted limber pine in the livingstone pocupine hills region – © AWA Files*

## PARKLAND REGION

### Waterton Parkland

The Waterton Parkland area consists mostly of private land to the east of Waterton Lakes National Park. The area is part of the Foothills Parkland Ecoregion. Rough fescue grasslands and trembling aspen groves characterize the region. 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 supports local landowners and conservationists in the region. Letters of support for 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 a concern to AWA.

### Rumsey

Lying in the transition between the southern grasslands and the northern boreal forest, Rumsey is a mosaic of trembling aspen woodland, fescue grassland and wetland habitats. Aspen parkland once stretched over 255,000 km<sup>2</sup> 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 and the lack of a management plan will inevitably see the loss of native intact features. Unsubstantiated reports of inappropriate grading by the grazing lease holder at a recent Prairie Conservation Forum general meeting will be investigated and the roll out of a management plan will be our focus in the coming months.

### Parkland Dunes

With rolling hills of native grasses interspersed with lush aspen groves, peatlands, and vibrant wetlands, the Parkland Dunes is an oasis in an otherwise agriculture-dominated landscape. Located in east-central Alberta, southeast of the Town of Wainwright, the Parkland Dunes is approximately 932 km<sup>2</sup> in size, and contains a small protected area, the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve which is 28 km<sup>2</sup> in size. Management of the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve is led by Alberta Parks but is also guided by the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve Advisory Committee. 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.

In Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve, there has been a noted absence of fire, with the last recorded fire in the 1980s. Shrub encroachment has been substantial and has contributed to the “squeezing out” of native species associated with the grasslands and dunes ecosystems, including a decrease in sharp tailed grouse. Concerns about managing aspen encroachment in the Ecological Reserve have been voiced for years with little decision-making or action taken. There is also 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 Government of Alberta and the Buffalo Park Grazing Association to investigate wildlife friendly fencing on the Reserve. They found that the safest passage through the fence, and the most preferred crossing choice for wildlife, was through open gates. Implementing measures such as the strategic placement of gates at preferred wildlife crossing points, leaving gates open when not needed for cattle, and constructing wildlife friendly fencing throughout the reserve would facilitate the movement of wildlife throughout the reserve and reduce the likelihood of injury to wildlife and damage to property. As scientific research is one of the prime reasons for establishing Ecological Reserves it is encouraging that the grazing association and students cooperated for such worthwhile research.



*AWA’s Parkland Dunes hike amazed the hikers as they walked across a beaver pond, through amazing sand dunes and learned about this vital ecosystem. Photo ©J. Skrajny*

In 2018, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP) Regional Advisory Council (RAC) Advice was finally released. AWA believes protection of the Parkland Dunes must be expanded beyond what has been identified in the report produced by the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Committee. There are additional public lands within the area; many of these are leased for grazing purposes. The entire area needs to be conserved and will provide a larger connected landscape for native fescue. The establishment of Heritage Rangelands would maintain the stewardship grazing offers while conserving these landscapes for future generations.



## 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. In a recent letter from the Government of Alberta, the Minister disappointingly stated their target for protection in these regions is only 5 percent even though Canada and Alberta have committed to Target 11 of the IUCN Aichi Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (2011-2020). The commitment requires that at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas be conserved by 2020. Canada's commitment also promises that "areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, will be 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. We launched a Wild Spaces 2020 awareness and engagement campaign in the current year.

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 2000 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 and although native grasslands are only currently 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.





## 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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 including 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 nor opposed to an elk hunt at Suffield NWA, provided it is done on foot and the need to control the numbers of elk is clearly 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 or 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 following through on the promise for a management plan is a priority.



## Milk River-Sage Creek

The 5000 km<sup>2</sup> 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.

In August 2017, AWA participated in a re-fencing initiative to help improve the safety of pronghorn antelope passage through the Milk River-Sage Creek area. The initiative was hosted by Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) and involved removing the barbed wire fencing in the area and replacing it with smooth wire. As pronghorns cannot jump they will often "scoot" under fencing, making barbed wire fencing particularly dangerous. The re-fencing event was a success, and helped demonstrate how human land-use decisions impact wildlife and their migration.

## 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. 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 likely will not prohibit new industrial development.

### **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 government has recognized the area needs protection in the SSRP and yet incredibly, has continued to approve applications for new oil development in this sensitive area.

Since 2015, AWA has engaged repeatedly with government departments and the Alberta Energy Regulator to seek restrictions on industrial development and advance formal protected area status. Our efforts were completely frustrated by Alberta Energy's renewal of subsurface leases in June 2018 and the dispute about prohibiting surface access continues.

Despite, and parallel to, the actions of Alberta Energy, 2018 brought forward promising changes with Alberta Environment and Parks moving forward with the proposed expansion and re-designation of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area. The proposal includes expanding the protected area by 3,173 hectares and re-designating it as a Heritage Rangeland. The Heritage Rangeland status offers improved protection for grasslands and acknowledges grazing as an integral part of grassland ecology. Public consultation showed significant public support for the proposed changes. The proposal is waiting for cabinet approval.

The approval may affect the Alberta Energy Regulator's parallel process launched in mid October 2018 announcing a hearing regarding surface access for oil and gas exploration. AWA is vehemently opposed to surface access and disturbance and will participate in any way possible if a hearing is called. The lack of urgency shown by the Alberta Government in the protection of this small but integral intact piece of native grasslands is incomprehensible.

### **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 for native vegetation and wildlife. Renewal of the lease has been stalled in government channels, and was expected before year end 2017 - we are still waiting.

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. In the summer of 2017, 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. An inspection tour of the burned area by MRMS occurred in the spring of 2018. Repairs to fencing damaged by the fire are ongoing.

The MRMS generally meets twice a year and will continue to manage this area with maintenance of ecological integrity as its priority.

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 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. PCF was established by the Government of Alberta in 1989 to convey support and commitment to implementing the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP). A PCAP is a five year blueprint for conserving, protecting and managing native prairie and parkland species, communities and habitats. The process was initiated by the World Wildlife Fund, Canada and the provincial governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta to offer a comprehensive vision for the preservation of Canada's prairies. Developing and renewing the current (PCAP) is one of the main roles of the PCF. The current PCAP was released January 2016 and will be applicable until 2020.

AWA believes the PCF meetings are an important way to meet with representatives from many different interests and perspectives; Alberta's PCF has almost 50 members. Members represent agricultural groups, conservation groups, land and resource management organizations, federal and provincial agencies, local and regional authorities and service agencies, industry, academia, and individuals. 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. AWA's executive director Christyann Olson was nominated to the PCF Board for a two year term in 2018.



### Foothills Restoration Forum

Foothills Restoration Forum (FRF) promotes the conservation and restoration of native grasslands in Alberta through education, outreach and research to improve reclamation practice and foster stewardship. The FRF began in 2006 as collaboration between members of provincial agencies, the ranching community, conservation organizations, industry, plant ecologists and reclamation practitioners. AWA has been a member of the Technical Advisory Committee of the FRF in the past and attends meetings of the forum. The multi-stakeholder group is focused on best practices for restoring fescue grasslands. The FRF provides the opportunity for informed debate and discussion and staff attend the annual workshops the forum organizes. 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 FRF.



*Greater-sage grouse male dancing is a rare site in Alberta we remain hopeful that work to increase numbers and protect grasslands habitat is making some progress – Photo ©C. Olson*

## WATER

*"I hope that perhaps if my grandchildren or great-grandchildren are at a lake they won't be afraid to swim or drink the water."*

*Dr. David Schindler on what he hopes his legacy will be to future generations.*

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

In October 2017, AWA began chairing the Alberta Environmental Network's Water Caucus and organizing its monthly calls. The Caucus is a forum for Alberta ENGOs to discuss emerging and ongoing water issues. In February 2018, Dr. John Pomeroy presented to the Water Caucus on the Global Water Futures research that, among other goals, aims to improve predictive modelling of water flows in many Alberta watersheds. In summer 2018, we analyzed the preliminary findings of a 10-year review of approved water management plans for the Oldman, Bow and Red Deer rivers that was initiated by regional watershed councils. AWA plans to comment on the final report when it is released later in 2018.

AWA provided comments on Alberta's December 2017 draft directive for water use in hydraulic fracking, which the government finalized in early 2018. In our view, it is a step forward to emphasize term licenses over temporary diversion licenses, but many regulatory gaps remain in terms of cumulative impacts and risks to aquatic ecosystems and water resources arise from fracking. These gaps include: continued low enforcement capacity and penalties; inadequate management of impacts to small lakes and tributaries; and unsustainable cumulative land disturbance and carbon emission concerns. In April 2018, AWA met with Shell to discuss their west central Alberta pilot projects for reducing fresh water usage in fracking.

Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) is Canada's largest UNESCO World Heritage Site, in no small part due to the outstanding universal values of the Peace-Athabasca Delta, which lies mostly within the Park. The Delta is one of the world's largest freshwater deltas and supports globally significant wildlife populations. In response to Mikisew Cree First Nation's petition to UNESCO, a monitoring team concluded in March 2017 that cumulative threats to the Delta are not being adequately managed. The threats include hydroelectric dams on the Peace River, climate change and oilsands developments along the Athabasca River.

This year AWA collaborated with Mikisew Cree First Nation and ENGO colleagues to encourage strong federal and provincial actions to reduce the identified threats to the Delta. In November 2017, our group issued a joint news release after the International Union on the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) downgraded WBNP's World Heritage Site rating to "Significant Concern". This is the worst conservation outlook for a Canadian World Heritage site. Parks Canada has prepared a strategic environmental assessment report on WBNP and this should lead to an action plan. In September 2017, AWA asked Parks Canada to add indicators on fish, water quality, wildlife contacts with tar sands tailings ponds, and unfunded tailings reclamation liabilities to the environmental assessment's scope. In April 2018, AWA asked Parks Canada to strengthen its draft environmental assessment report, including adding the significant risk of inadequately reclaimed oil sands mine tailings dams because of technical and financial security shortcomings. We will continue actions which reduce the substantial threats to the Peace Athabasca Delta.



In October 2017, AWA called for resolution of the many unanswered questions concerning Alberta's regulatory oversight of tailings dams, four years after Alberta's largest tailings spill disaster. In 2013 the catastrophic failure of the Obed coal mine tailings pond structure released 670 million litres of water, containing tonnes of sediment and coal fines, into important fish-bearing tributaries of the upper Athabasca River. The resulting plume of contaminated water entered the Athabasca River and curtailed water withdrawals of downstream communities. We published articles in the September and December 2017 *Wild Lands Advocate* to underline our concerns about safeguards and procedures. For example, the Alberta Energy Regulator's (AER) public 2016 Dam Safety Inspection & Audit Results is one page. AER assessments and dam safety registry for 100 containment structures are not currently public and – AWA was told by AER Dam Safety – may not ever be public. The public deserves to know more about regulatory findings to prevent similar dam failures from occurring.

AWA participated in autumn 2017 meetings of a multi-sector Athabasca river basin modelling initiative that began in September 2016. We have raised strong concerns about ecologically harmful impacts arising from proposed new on-stream dams and reservoirs. We seek sustainable development, stronger wetland retention and restoration, and protected areas opportunities to maintain and restore healthy watersheds.

In the Bow watershed, we are monitoring proposals for major diversions and dams upstream of Calgary. These are, in our view, a misplaced focus for addressing flood risk, instead of more ecologically sound floodplain management and 'room for the river' management ideas.

In the Red Deer watershed, AWA commented in February 2018 on the proposed terms of reference for the environmental assessment of the Alberta government's Special Areas water supply proposal. This proposal is to build a 100 kilometer long water pipeline to divert water from the Red Deer River and pump it east, in order to water livestock and convert ecologically vital grasslands stream corridors to irrigated tame pasture. The government's cost estimates are \$410 million for construction and \$5.5 million annual operating costs. This expensive long-distance water pipeline idea has been studied many times, and has been abandoned for good reason. AWA does not see a need to pipe water for non-household use to arid regions of the province. We are very concerned the government is bringing this forward again and has so far declined to assess the environmental impacts of irrigation or grazing scenarios that are directly attributable to this project.

### Wetland policy

Alberta's Wetland Policy was applied to the 'White Area', or settled areas administrative region, in June 2015. In July 2016 the Policy was applied to the 'Green Area', the forested public lands that make up 58 percent of Alberta. Wetland Policy goals are to protect wetlands of the highest value, to conserve and restore wetlands in areas of high loss, to avoid and minimize negative impacts to wetlands and, where necessary, to replace lost wetland value. Green Area wetlands consist mostly of organic peat-forming wetlands called "peatlands", which occupy between 30 and 40 percent of northern boreal areas. Boreal peatlands are a massive storage sink for carbon and play other crucial ecological roles, including moderating the intensity of floods, drought and fires, providing wildlife habitat, and filtering water.

AWA volunteer researcher Mai-Linh Huynh published an assessment of Alberta's Green Area wetland policy in the September 2018 *Wild Lands Advocate*. She concluded that boreal wetlands



are not adequately protected by this Policy. Industrial project applications completed before July 2016 are exempt, meaning that Alberta's extensive oil sands open pit mine and drillable *in situ* projects are almost completely excluded from this Policy. The Policy does not require operators to compensate for the temporal loss of wetland function during the life of their projects, which can span decades. In addition, questionable wetland 'abundance' valuation methods are devaluing replacement requirements for Green Area wetlands. The Policy also has no mechanism to deny applications that propose to destroy high value wetlands. The wetland regulatory system will continue to evolve, and AWA will continue to seek stronger measures to secure, sustain and restore our vitally important wetlands.

Oil sands wetland monitoring is still under development in the joint federal-provincial Oil Sands Monitoring (OSM) Program. The overall OSM agreement was renewed in December 2017. AWA and Alberta Environmental Network colleagues have requested a clear ongoing ENGO role in OSM activities.

AWA presented at an October 2017 OSM wetland webinar hosted by Alberta Environment and Parks. We outlined the extensive fragmentation of the oilsands region by industrial linear disturbance, and the evidence suggesting this will impair wetland function and reduce the resiliency of the boreal forest to drought and fire. These impacts make it essential, in our view, for OSM not only to monitor, but also to predict, cumulative impacts of oil sands development to local and regional wetlands hydrology and other wetland functions. Prediction will be crucial to responsible development decisions that minimize irreversible biodiversity losses and maximize the ecological benefits of wetland retention and restoration. In December 2017, AWA participated in the OSM Wetland Monitoring Integration Workshop, which focused on the wetlands impacts and locations that should be monitored.

## Water for Life

Alberta's 'Water for Life' strategy was developed in 2003 and confirmed in subsequent policy reviews. Its three goals are: safe, secure drinking water supply; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. AWA is one of the Environmental Sector Board members of the multi-sector Alberta Water Council, which provides advice to the Alberta government on implementing Water for Life goals. In the past year, we participated in a Council strategy workshop as well as Council Board meetings. Together with our ENGO colleagues, we seek strong tracking of the impact of Council's recommendations to government to advance healthy aquatic ecosystems.

One of the key partnerships of the Water for Life strategy is regional watershed planning and advisory councils (WPACs). AWA is a member of most WPACs. In April 2018 we presented at the South East Alberta Watershed Alliance's forum on responsible recreation in and near water. We outlined our Bighorn backcountry recreation monitoring findings in the upper North Saskatchewan, and the importance of reducing harmful off-road motorized vehicle impacts in the upper Oldman watershed.

We were pleased to partner with the Bow River Basin Council (BRBC) to sponsor research into sedimentation impacts from multiple land uses in the upper Elbow River watershed. The research was presented at the BRBC's 2018 Science Forum and described in a June 2018 Wild Lands Advocate article. Publication is forthcoming and a second presentation to the BRBC Forum is planned for December.





## FORESTS

*The greatest wonder is that we can see these trees  
and not wonder more. - Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Alberta's boreal and Eastern Slopes forests continue to be managed with a timber-centric philosophy. Policies need to move towards valuing forests far beyond the price of timber. There is a need to consider the purification of water and air, water storage and the related slow release of run-off. Healthy forests mean healthy wildlife and healthy communities, they are inextricably linked.

In 2017, 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 percent 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 percent minimum average retention was reduced to 5 percent plus existing riparian buffers, so less than 10 percent in total.

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. 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 needed.

These issues persist into 2018; however, the series of informal conversations with the Forest Tenure, Trade and Policy (FTTP) branch of Alberta Agriculture & Forestry have provided a venue for collaboration and an opportunity to be heard. Conversations with FTTP staff will continue into the 2018-19 planning cycle, and will expand to include a larger group of environmental stakeholders as part of the Fish and Forests Initiative.

### **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. For the past eight years we have continued to lead the Fish and Forests Forum as a collaborative and workshop-based way to bring together experts for constructive exchanges of ideas. 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. The scope of concern comprises the forests across the province, including in the Alberta foothills from the US border to the northern Bighorn area, the boreal, and the watersheds in those forests. AWA hosted four Fish and Forests roundtables in the past year, in November, February, April and June and coordinated the formation of the Alberta Forest Legislative Working Group. The Legislative Working Group is currently investigating various opportunities to improve the policies, regulations and standards that direct forest management.

As we entered the 2017 - 2018 fiscal year, AWA met with the Forest Tenure, Trade and Policy (FTTP) branch of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, to discuss some forest tenure-related policies,



including information that we would like to be made more transparent to stakeholders and the public. In April 2018, two members of FTTP presented at Fish and Forests on the basics of Alberta forestry tenure. In June 2018, we met with FTTP staff to increase our understanding of the steps involved in various levels of policy, legislative and regulatory reviews. These meetings paved the way for further FTTP staff engagement in Fish and Forests meetings later in 2018, which we look forward to continuing.

In October and December 2017 AWA attended workshops held by fri Research to discuss diverse understandings of 'ecosystem-based forestry'. We supported the idea of community engagement in the upfront identification of environmental and social forest values to retain and restore, and provided a critique of the notion of equating clearcut impacts with those of fire and insect disturbance.

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. There are more than 25 individuals and groups who participate in the initiative.

### **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 the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) 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. Since 2016, FSC has facilitated a number of consultation opportunities for a Controlled Wood Strategy. The Controlled Wood Strategy should ideally move away from the Mixed Wood label, and encourage businesses to shift to 100 percent FSC certified wood. AWA has followed the revision process and we plan to participate to ensure ecosystem-based management values are adhered to in the Strategy. We expect the Controlled Wood Strategy to be released by the end of 2018.

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 final draft of the new FSC standard for Canada and submitted it to FSC International. The final National Forest Management Standard for Canada is expected to be approved for release in December 2018.

Key issues for the Standard Development Group include high conservation value forests, protected areas, intact forest landscapes, caribou, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for Indigenous Peoples.

The second FSC Boreal Forest meeting took place in Espoo, Finland on May 17, 2017. FSC Canada staff attended along with representatives from AI-Pac, Alberta Wilderness Association, 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,



other risks, social responsibility and respect for indigenous peoples and communities. Several motions were discussed, including Motion 37 - Landscape Approach to Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs) 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.

In September 2018 AWA and AI-Pac were represented at the third FSC Boreal Forest meeting in Tallinn, Estonia where discussions continued on IFLs. There was controversy over a “sustainable intensification” discussion. An approach AWA believes will not find much uptake in Canada.



*Arrowleaf Balsamroot (Balsamorhiza sagittata) Photo: © AWA*

## ENERGY

### Conventional Oil and Gas

Sometimes AWA's efforts on one of our many files serve to exemplify the overall state of one the particular area of concern. The case of Milk River Ridge is such a case; AWA's ongoing efforts to secure protection for the native grasslands of Milk River Ridge summarize well the challenges we face in getting the government to manage our conventional oil and gas resources in a manner that is sensitive to ecological values.

The oil development ambitions of Granite Oil, a small cap petroleum company focused on exploiting Alberta's Bakken petroleum resources in the Milk River Ridge area, have presented a classic conflict between industrialization and grassland protection. AWA has worked with local landowners for years to ensure that this special place doesn't taste the steel of drill bits and pipelines. In 2017 Granite's leases in the area were due to expire – an expiry that AWA urged the Alberta Energy Minister to approve. Instead, the government renewed the Granite leases. In June 2018 Granite applied to the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) to drill a multi-well battery and pipeline just outside the existing boundaries of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area. In response, AWA registered its opposition to this application with the Alberta Energy Regulator.

This Granite oil case tests significantly the province's commitment to say "no" to the additional industrialization of Alberta's native grasslands. The Milk River Ridge area that Granite hopes to exploit sits just outside the boundaries of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area. Towards the end of the period covered in this annual report, Alberta Environment and Parks proposed to expand the boundaries of the Twin River protected area and reclassify it to a rangeland from a natural area. The reclassification actually will increase opportunities for grazing throughout the rangeland – AWA always has supported cattle grazing practices that promote healthy grasslands. The proposed expansion will take in the lands Granite Oil hopes to industrialize and thereby should prevent the proposed drilling. New oil and gas, with associated development, would be prohibited if the proposed expansion proceeds. AWA will continue to work with land owners who share our belief that our native grasslands, already a very rare commodity in Alberta, should be protected, not industrialized. In our ongoing interactions with the Minister of Energy, her officials, and the officials of the AER we will continue to insist that government must prioritize grasslands protection.

### Cumulative Effects Management

AWA continues to engage with the AER on its commitment to manage the energy industry's cumulative impacts on air, lands and water using science-based indicators and thresholds. AWA views this type of cumulative effects management (CEM) regulatory system as essential for responsible energy development. Alberta government officials have promised such a system for years, and should expect to use it in sub-regional planning and project-level approvals and renewals, but have not yet delivered it.

AWA is active in Alberta Environmental Network's CEM group, which engages with both Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) and the AER to advance an Alberta regulatory CEM system. In July 2017, the Alberta Environment Network group provided feedback on the AER's Draft Cumulative



Effects Management Framework; we have not yet seen an updated version. In September 2017 the group met AEP and AER staff to discuss what progress they are making jointly on indicators and pilot projects. In April 2018, the AEN group met with senior AER officials to explain the sustained efforts AEN members have made over a period of four years to move CEM forward at AER, and little progress has been seen. We learned that AER's Science and Evaluation branch has added staff expertise in land, air, water to integrate with sub-surface energy values. In addition AER stated that they plan to start a pilot project using several biodiversity indicators provided by AEP, with a goal to finish by March 2019.

In June 2018, AER staff updated us on their Area-based pilot water management pilot project in the MD of Greenview from 2016-2018. An indigenous consultation group discussed ways that traditional knowledge and land practices could assist the AER creating responsible resource development regulations to support a sustainable environment for all future generations. A separate multi-stakeholder panel produced 23 recommendations for AER and AEP. While some compliance issues have been tightened, a basin management framework has not yet been implemented. AWA will continue to seek meaningful energy cumulative effects management.

### **Oil Sands Mine Financial Security Program**

Major reforms of Alberta's Mine Financial Security Program for oil sands are needed. The problems with the current system include: serious unresolved technical problems for site reclamation, including peatland re-establishment and tailings pond reclamation; a lack of public disclosure of liability assumptions, and therefore likely significant under-estimation of liabilities; and very small upfront financial security requirements. There is an unacceptably high risk that the public will be stuck with multi-billion dollar costs of managing toxic abandoned tar sands mine sites. Instead, Alberta should require detailed liability disclosure and the posting of full financial security to match incurred liabilities. This would spur timely, progressive reclamation, and would significantly reduce the unfair mine clean-up burden that we are passing to future generations.

In summer 2017, AWA and ENGO colleagues were delegates in a government-led multi-sector review of a small aspect of tar sands mine cleanup liabilities. One outcome of that review was to suggest financial penalties if miners exceed their own planned volumes of tailings. We appreciated being part of this process. In our August 2017 ENGO recommendations, we took the opportunity to propose broad reforms to the Oil Sands Mine Financial Security program. In September and October 2017, we briefed both AEP and the AER about our concerns. To date, there has been no commitment by regulators to the kind of reforms needed to reduce public financial risks.

Our December 2017 *Wild Lands Advocate* article described some of the unresolved technical challenges of bitumen mining reclamation and provided a critique of the elements of Alberta's weak, overly secretive financial security program. In March 2018, we published a *Wild Lands Advocate* article by an internship student describing alternative mine financial security approaches in other jurisdictions.



## Tenure

As noted above, AWA engaged throughout the year with Alberta Energy to prevent extensions of expiring energy leases in prime grassland conservation areas, particularly in the Milk River Ridge – Twin River area. In January 2018, AWA and ENGO colleagues met with Alberta Energy officials regarding the government’s review of oilsands lease continuations. We want to ensure this decision minimizes surface disturbance in caribou ranges, to uphold Alberta’s commitment to achieve self-sustaining caribou populations.

## Renewable Energy

Alberta’s Climate Leadership Plan was a historic announcement by the provincial government to respond to climate change by putting a price on carbon pollution and committing to increase the percentage of Alberta’s electricity supplied by renewable energy sources. As important as these climate change and public health goals are, developing renewable energy sources such as wind and solar must proceed in a fashion respecting and promoting wildlife and landscape protection and health values. One way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is through more renewable energy projects, and without diligence in planning and site selection these projects can create damaging new disturbances. AWA continues to oppose any renewable energy project, including transmission lines and other infrastructure, on public lands (leased or not-leased), and promotes the usage of previously disturbed brownfield sites as an alternative.

In August 2018, the province of Alberta withdrew from the pan-Canadian framework on climate change in response to the federal court decision to revoke approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. The Premier announced the province would freeze its carbon tax at \$30 per tonne, abandoning requirements to increase the tax to \$40 in 2021 and \$50 in 2022 as stated within the accord.

AWA contributed to the development of the Wildlife Directives for wind energy (2016) and solar energy (2017) which provide operating guidelines to the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC). Unfortunately the directives are not binding on the AUC, potentially reducing the “standards” that must be met. The *Wildlife Act* provides the legal basis for enforcing much of the directive but is weak with respect to protecting habitat. Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) has informed AWA they are working closely with AUC to ensure these standards are followed: AEP plans to “sign-off” on projects and aid the AUC in creating environmental conditions for approvals. The impacts of large solar and wind footprints on the landscape are significant. AWA opposes development on public land and sensitive landscapes, including native prairie.

## Coal

The Government 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 increase the percentage of electricity supplied from renewable energy sources to 30 percent by 2030; it will do this by replacing up to two thirds of the retiring coal capacity with renewable energy. One third of that coal capacity will be replaced 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 steps to help prevent extreme climate change impacts. AWA continues to oppose coal projects that threaten Alberta’s wilderness or compromise ecological value.



## 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 with a production capacity of four million tonnes a year, with a possibility to expand the mine. The 'Friends of Grassy Mountain', a loose coalition of local interested parties was formed in 2015 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 a public hearing.

Concerns have been raised by the local 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 (CEAA 2012)*. Accordingly, it required the company 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; the federal agency again demanded that the proponent respond to a number of information requests, following which the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency would give an update. In August 2018, the Agency issued yet another request for additional information in order to fulfill EIS requirements.

In August 2018, a Joint Review Panel for the environmental assessment was established and the panel members were appointed. The Panel must now hold a public comment period on "the sufficiency and technical merit" of the EIS to determine whether it has enough information to proceed with a hearing.



## WILDLIFE

*I love bears and the wildlands where they live.  
Bears have fascinated me, scared me 'til my heart pounded, and inspired me...  
They have helped me to learn about the diversity of life  
on earth and how nature works. -- Dr. Steven Herrero*

Alberta's Fish and Wildlife Policy is more than 30 years old and does not protect wildlife. It does not represent contemporary science or the public's regard for wildlife. Alberta needs an updated policy and accompanying regulations that will protect sensitive species and biodiversity generally, in line with its international commitments.

The 1980 Wildlife Policy was written at a time when there was far less regard for the intrinsic value of wildlife, when certain populations and their habitats were seen as inexhaustible and the primary consideration was for "wildlife to pay its way". AWA believes this approach is seriously outdated and inadequate. Sound wildlife policy complemented by sound regulations would result in more responsible natural resource management decisions.

### 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. The federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* and other pieces of legislation provide 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.

AWA continues to monitor and provide input on the progress of recovery processes for 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.

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. Studies have shown that when a listing decision is made, species perceived to be economically valuable, are managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), or those that occur only in Canada are the least likely to receive listing. 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.

As critical habitat orders only apply to federal lands, there are many species that have been left stranded. In the case of caribou, AWA has been working relentlessly with colleagues across the country to ensure enough habitat is protected to ensure the survival and recovery of this iconic species. Recently, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada released the first report of its kind, acknowledging that provinces and territories have failed to protect almost all of critical caribou habitat. AWA has been asking for the Minister to issue a safety net order, which a Minister can do if she believe provinces/territories have failed to protect a species. Safety net orders extend the protections under SARA to provincial and territorial lands. To date, not a single safety net order has been issued.





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 specific sections for details of our work on species at risk that include woodland caribou, greater sage-grouse, native trout including westslope cutthroat trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, bull trout, wood and plains bison.

## Grizzly Bears

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; it stated "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." 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 draft revised Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan was released. While AWA appreciates the release of this long overdue document, we remain 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 in 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 the province.

While the rehabilitation of orphaned black bear cubs was reinstated in the spring of 2018, AWA is concerned that the rehabilitation of grizzly bears, a threatened species, continues to be banned. This is especially concerning given that Alberta's grizzly bears have some of the lowest reproduction rates of any species in the world.

In May 2018, the Alberta Government released the number of recorded grizzly bear deaths over the last two years, showing that the threatened species is dying at a troubling rate. Grizzly bear deaths in 2016 marked the highest number of human-caused grizzly deaths since stopping the hunt in 2006. When the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan was written in 2008, it was estimated that there were fewer than 700 grizzlies remaining in the province. Since that time, a total of 224 bear deaths have been documented, with an average of 19 deaths a year; all but 17 have been caused by humans.

During the summer of 2018, AWA met with the recently appointed chair of the Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) to address our concerns over potential delisting of grizzly bears as a threatened species along with AWA's fundamental concerns with the *Wildlife Act*. AWA believes that without a complete population assessment and substantial progress made to protect their habitat, delisting grizzly bears as threatened is inappropriate. Without addressing what drove grizzly bears to a threatened status in the first place, delisting grizzly bears will likely decrease public support for the species and return them to a jeopardized state. AWA continues to urge decision makers to address the concerning lack of legal obligations within the *Wildlife Act* as it has considerable repercussions for the development of effective recovery plans for species at risk.



The summer of 2018 also included many grizzly bear advisories for the public within the eastern slopes and parts of central Alberta. AWA believes that comprehensive and well-funded BearSmart and Karelain Bear Dog programs are important for public education and reducing the number of human-bear conflicts. These initiatives will have a tremendous overall impact on the successful recovery of grizzly bears within Alberta. Immediate action, including placing stringent limits on the amount of motorized access into grizzly bear habitat, must be taken to address the top reasons for grizzly bear deaths and yet there is no sense of urgency within government.

### **Black Bears**

Although black bears seem 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.

In the spring of 2018, the Alberta Government announced that the rehabilitation of orphaned black bear cubs would be permitted. Significant pressure from the community made a difference with decision makers. AWA welcomed this announcement and encouraged this measure to be expanded to other species, in particular threatened grizzly bears. Regrettably, other wildlife continue to be prohibited from rehabilitation efforts include bighorn sheep, mountain goats, wolves, coyotes, black bear adults, and cougars.

### **Caribou**

Woodland caribou are perfectly adapted to Alberta's forests, and are important to Indigenous peoples. However, their survival is threatened by the excessive cumulative impacts of energy and forestry activities, which fragment the older forests they rely upon to avoid encounters with predators. In 2013, scientists concluded Alberta caribou populations were falling approximately 50 percent every 8 years. Many other forest-reliant species will also benefit if Alberta's caribou recover to self-sustaining populations.

Alberta has committed to achieve self-sustaining woodland caribou for the fifteen caribou populations on provincial lands. However, in October 2017 the Alberta government missed the key 5-year deadline of the federal boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy. It did not, and still has not, developed range-specific plans to attain the minimum 65 percent undisturbed habitat conditions that caribou need. In December 2017, Alberta released a draft Provincial Woodland Caribou Range Plan; it described range disturbances and outlined some useful management ideas, but it omitted range-specific commitments to achieve the minimum habitat target.

AWA is working intensively to advance habitat-based caribou range plans that value economic concerns of nearby communities. We have engaged with Alberta government caribou range planners and Canadian wildlife officials throughout the year, and in spring 2018 we participated in multi-sector workshops convened by the Alberta government. We support Alberta developing range-specific scenarios with Indigenous and multi-sector groups that adapt industrial land uses to meet caribou habitat requirements. Solutions include conservation areas, managed total energy and forestry surface disturbance and infrastructure, and habitat restoration programs, all



of which should be optimized to be ‘least cost and most beneficial’ to communities while achieving self-sustaining caribou populations. We have also urged rigorous and transparent socio-economic analyses of these options.

In the summer of 2018, we partnered with David Suzuki Foundation and Harmony Foundation to commission a study of the economic impact of restoring woodland caribou habitat in the Bistcho and Yates ranges in northwestern Alberta. The report was authored by eminent natural resource economist Dr. Tom Power. Published in October 2018, it concluded that at least 65 percent undisturbed caribou habitat could be reached in the Bistcho-Yates ranges, including establishing two new conservation areas, with almost no displacement of existing industrial activity. It also found that a reasonable Bistcho-Yates seismic line restoration program would generate a solid employment opportunity for this region. The report recommended, for all caribou ranges, that we begin with shared goals of caribou recovery and community economic activity to build optimized ‘least cost’ solutions.

AWA has been very active raising public awareness of our threatened caribou, and how to help them survive and thrive. With support from Harmony Foundation and the Calgary Foundation, and in collaboration with ENGO colleagues, we launched the Caribou4Ever.ca website in October 2017. This website is a highly visible resource for information and action on woodland caribou. Its features include a woodland caribou Q and A, interactive maps of disturbance ‘hot spots’ in several ranges, ready-to-print brochures, and links to scientific references and recent caribou-related news. Caribou4Ever.ca also includes an easily personalized draft letter for people to write provincial and federal decision makers, and a virtual caribou postcard to send to Alberta’s Premier.

AWA’s summer and autumn 2018 ‘Caribou Flag’ project engaged artists of all ages who designed more than 200 flags. These wonderful flags are now being used in displays at events and conferences to help demonstrate Albertans’ concerns about saving our caribou from extinction.

In autumn 2017, we presented on the vital importance of caribou habitat protection and restoration to gatherings in the communities of High Level, Manning, Whitecourt, Edmonton and Calgary. Through the winter, hundreds of concerned Albertans added their personal messages to AWA’s printed caribou postcards, which we presented to the Premier’s office: we held a November 2017 Legislature rally to present the first batch of 300. For an AWA talk and for students at Strathcona-Tweedsmuir School, we screened the beautiful and relevant film “Last Stand: The Vanishing Caribou Rainforest” about BC mountain caribou, adding comments on Alberta’s caribou situation. In February 2018 we worked with ENGO colleagues to hold a press conference to accompany caribou public open house events organized by the provincial government. In May 2018, AWA was part of a caribou range plan panel discussion hosted by the Canadian Heavy Oil Association.

For Alberta caribou on federal lands, we recommended to Parks Canada in August 2017 that Jasper National Park’s proposed multi-species plan needed stronger caribou habitat measures, including habitat identification and protection. We are also making it clear to the federal and Alberta governments that critical habitat protection provisions in the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* must be upheld on provincial lands. Ecojustice, on behalf of AWA, David Suzuki Foundation, Cold Lake First Nations, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation, corresponded in May 2018 with Environment and Climate Change Canada’s Minister to request the use of a measured, interim habitat safety net order for declining northeast Alberta



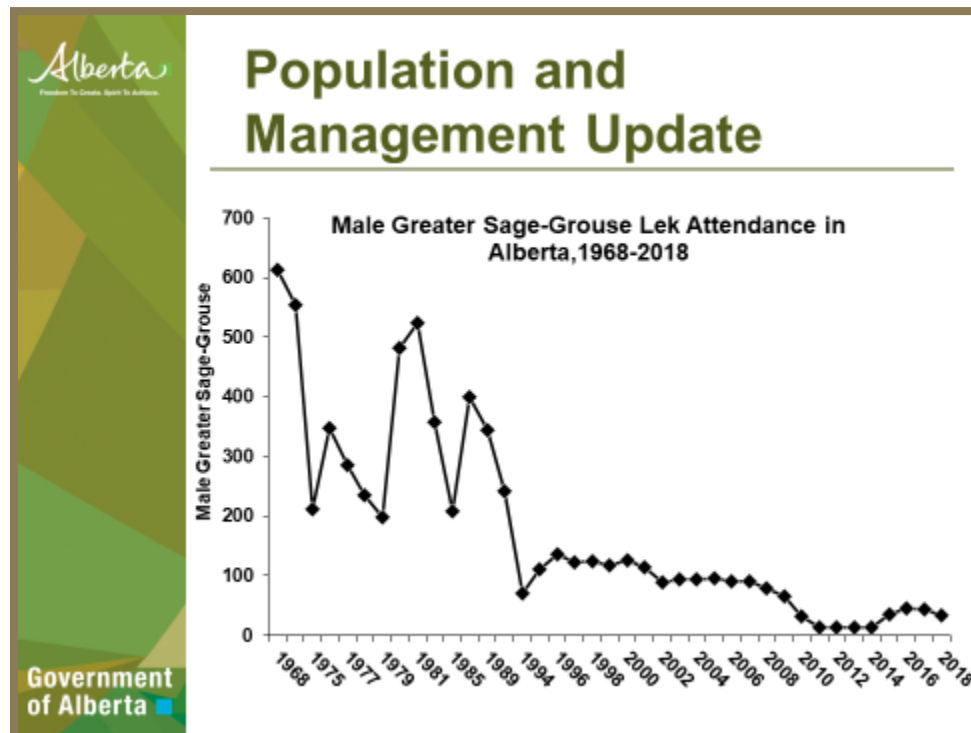
caribou herds, in light of the Minister's April 2018 findings of unprotected caribou critical habitat (see Primrose-Lakeland section for more details).

### Greater Sage-Grouse

The long-term future of our grasslands, which provide habitat for greater sage-grouse as well as 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.

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, Alberta's 2018 spring count yielded 9 less males; only 34 males were counted. 2017 found 43 males on 3 leks, compared to 40 males in 2016. West Nile virus was confirmed as the cause of death for one Greater Sage-grouse in southern Alberta this year.



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.

Translocation to Alberta from Montana did not occur due to poor weather this year. Alberta Environment continued with predator and habitat projects and the Calgary Zoo released some birds that they are tracking. 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 much more significant issue. Costly rearing and release programs are no substitute for habitat.

AWA, currently represented by Ecojustice, is to participate in legal action filed by the city of Medicine Hat and LGX Oil 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 soon.

## 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. AWA believes using the wolf cull 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 large predator is one option we would like to see explored.

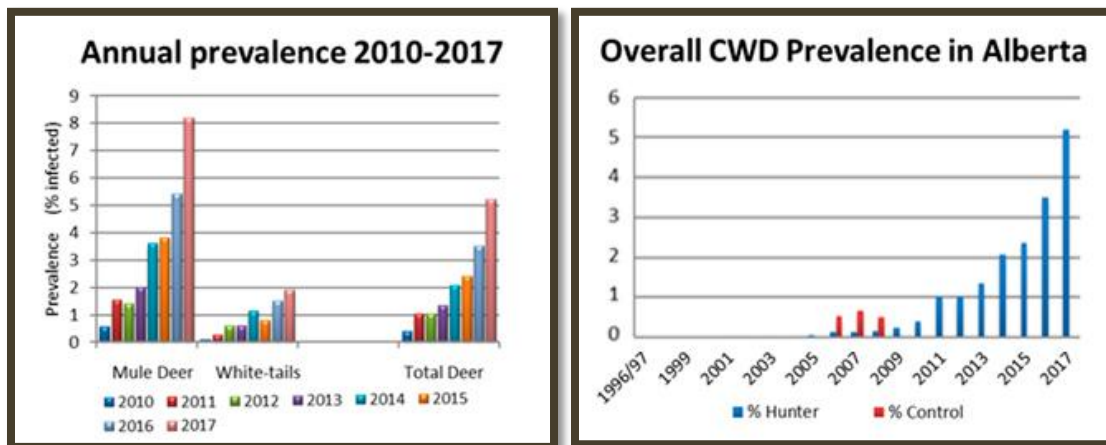
## Game Farming

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), which unfortunately was passed and reclassified domestic deer and elk as "diversified livestock." 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, spread from game farms to the wild by 1996. Since then, the growth of the disease has been exponential and as of 2017 has expanded westward into central Alberta; according the provincial government's update "a cluster of cases was found near Tofield (70km east of Edmonton) and CWD was detected well up the Bow River near Strathmore (50km east of Calgary)".





CWD prevalence in heads that are submitted for testing. Source: Government of Alberta

AWA has requested both federal and provincial leadership in confronting CWD and in eliminating the game farming industry in the province. 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.

although 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 but 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 also mean 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. AWA is frustrated with the lack of concern for this significant issue and in ongoing efforts supported other colleagues earlier this year in the release of further reports supporting the findings that this disease needs efforts to eradicate the threat to humans.

## 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 (see “Grassy Mountain”) 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 2015, AWA wrote in support of a listing as threatened for bull trout under SARA. We continue to await federal listing of this species. AWA was also involved in provincial recovery efforts for bull trout, participating in the development of a recovery strategy for the species.

In late 2017 the government announced plans to recover native fish in the Central Eastern Slopes of Alberta. Called the North Central Native Trout Recovery Program (NCNT), it aimed to close a number of watersheds to angling for 5 years, which would be coupled with other initiatives such as habitat restoration, water quality improvements, and the suppression of non-native fish.

Some anglers have raised concerns, arguing that they were being progressively restricted while habitat issues were not being addressed. As a result, in late February 2018, the Environment Minister announced the government would be conducting an independent review to confirm whether the approach taken by the NCNT is the best one for native trout recovery.

This summer, AWA was invited to participate in a meeting to discuss how to best move forward with the science review, which will be conducted by the Environmental Monitoring and Science Division. The stakeholders at the table – which included anglers, conservation groups, and scientists – agreed to act as an Advisory Committee during the Third-Party Science Review; to be completed by the end of the year.



AWA looks forward to the completion of the Third-Party Science Review and urges implementation of recovery efforts to begin as soon as possible.

### ***Westslope cutthroat trout***

Westslope cutthroat trout, provincially and federally designated as threatened, has been an ongoing priority for AWA conservation efforts. Now that a critical habitat order is 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, AWA pointed to the opportunity that the Castle Parks present for westslope cutthroat trout recovery and advocated for an immediate or expedited ban of motorized recreation from the Castle Parks. We support the government's decision to phase out OHV use in the Castle; with the publication of the final management plan in 2018, OHV use has now been effectively phased out of the Wildland Provincial Park. AWA will continue to monitor and ensure the government will uphold its commitment to prioritize restoration efforts in westslope critical habitat (see "Castle").
2. AWA advocated 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.

### **Wood and Plains Bison**

AWA's concern over the health of Alberta's wood and plains bison populations is longstanding. We strive to ensure that populations of wild bison – bison that have not been subject to gene introgression through hybridization with cattle – are recovered in Alberta.

In November 2013, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) re-examined the status of wood bison. The re-examination led COSEWIC to designate wood bison as a Species of Special Concern (it had been listed as Threatened in April 1988 and May 2000). Calculations made between 2010 and 2015 estimated the disease-free population of Wood Bison to be approximately 4,363 animals distributed in nine, free-ranging herds.

Despite COSEWIC's change in designation the wood bison still remains a Threatened species under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The federal government published a final recovery strategy for wood bison in 2018. Due to insufficient information that recovery strategy did not identify any critical habitat for this species of bison. The critical habitat identification timeline, previously ending in 2021, has now been extended to 2023. The recovery strategy promises that one or more action plans for Wood Bison "will be completed by 2022."

In Alberta, listed bison are only found in the Bison Protection Area in northwestern Alberta and the part of northeastern Alberta approximately between Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial





Park and Wood Buffalo National Park that is home to the Ronald Lake herd. In the former area it is illegal to hunt, harm, or traffic in bison without a licence; hunting of the Ronald Lake herd in the aforementioned part of northeastern Alberta is closed until further notice.

AWA believes the recovery of wood bison is possible with legislative change, appropriate hunting regulations, the development of strong action plans, and the designation of critical habitat.

In 2013 COSEWIC also re-assessed the status of plains bison and confirmed the Threatened status the subspecies was accorded in COSEWIC's 2004 report. Paradoxically, the COSEWIC's Threatened designation has yet to see the plains bison receive any status under SARA. Also unlike the wood bison, the plains bison in Alberta is not classified as wildlife under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. Instead, all plains bison are considered livestock.

In early 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 July 2018 these bison, now numbering 31, were released into a 1,200 square-kilometre zone. AWA was pleased to see the provincial government create the Upper Red Deer River Special Bison Area in August. In this 239-square-kilometre area plains bison are to be treated as wildlife.

AWA hopes that this provincial designation is the first step towards differentiating types of bison according to ownership. Instead of the geographical designation adopted by the province the status of Plains Bison should 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. Such differentiation would also go some distance in implementing the desire of some First Nations to see the provincial government change the status of Plains Bison to wildlife.

### 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 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. 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.

The Lake Louise resort in Banff National Park was charged after it came to light in 2013 that employees had cut down trees along a ski run. The Crown alleges at least 39 endangered Whitebark pine were felled. Whitebark pine trees take 30 to 50 years before they are able to reproduce, and when they do have cones, it takes a Clark's Nutcracker birds, to open them and bury them in the ground. The long-lived, five-needle pine is native to high elevations, and is threatened by invasive disease, fire and climate change. It is considered crucial because it provides food and habitat for animals and helps stabilize steep subalpine slopes. The resort pleaded guilty on two charges – one under the Species At Risk Act and the other under the Canada National Parks Act in December 2017. A sentencing hearing was scheduled for July 2018. The results are not known at the time of writing this report.



# Government Policy

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*"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 for 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 operators 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 Alberta Auditor General Report published July 2015 was critical of the Government of Alberta, noting that it does not track lease transfers or the value of leases or the benefits, realized by grazing lease holders, including substantial monetary compensation obtained under the Surface Rights Act. 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. We realize the process is slow but 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 2018, 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, or should 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.

During the summer 2018, AWA launched a social media campaign to reenergize our Public Lands video series. The short videos are about four minutes long and provide information 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 and we hope inspiring public involvement. Some topics 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?" We have documented between 37 and 709 views of the individual videos in the set of nine videos dealing with public lands. Our outreach and uptake of this important educational tool needs more effort.

The summer of 2018 included the creation of the Wilderness Roadshow - an amalgamation of AWA's Public Lands film series and *Wild Spaces 2020* campaign. The campaign includes



presentations in communities throughout central and southern Alberta with a segment tailored towards elementary school children. AWA hopes to engage with interested audiences in learning more about Alberta public lands and their intrinsic values. Promoting more public knowledge and participation in important decisions pertaining to public lands provides a solid platform for AWA's *Wild Spaces 2020* campaign which highlights Areas of Concern that require increased protection and better management of land-use activities.

### Tax-recovery Lands

Tax-recovery lands are lands that were at one time privately owned and forfeited to the Government of Alberta as a result of failure of their owners to meet tax obligations. Since 1930, the province 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 government 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 - Federal

AWA continues to be concerned that ecological integrity, the Minister's first priority under the *National Parks Act*, too often is sacrificed to commercial and economic values in Parks Canada decision-making. This concern animates AWA's interactions with Parks Canada.

During the past year Parks Canada developed proposed multi-species action plans to satisfy the Agency's obligations under the *Species at Risk Act*. In 2017, AWA commented on the proposed plans for Banff, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes National Parks, finding all of the proposed plans to be woefully insufficient. The proposed plans lacked measurable actions, deadlines, and firm targets for the recovery of the species at risk found within our national parks. As AWA argued, a glaring weakness of all these plans concerns the issue of accountability; the vagueness of these plans will make it very difficult, if not impossible, for the public to hold the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Parks Canada accountable for their actions. Despite the concerns raised by AWA and other conservationists, the plans were finalized in December 2017 without making any significant improvements

This year, the City of Calgary has been considering submitting a bid to host the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games and using Banff National Park as an Olympic/Paralympic venue. In April 2018, AWA wrote to national, provincial, and municipal political leaders to insist that "any Olympic bid exploration by Calgary must recognize National Parks are not a suitable venue." AWA's view now, as it was for prior Winter Olympics proposals, is that Olympic and Paralympic events will further threaten and compromise Banff National Park's ecological integrity.

Another commercialization pressure on our mountain parks emerged in the form of the draft Sunshine Village Ski Area Site Guidelines for Development and Use. In our submission on the draft document, AWA argued that there is no ecological justification for increasing the Parks



Canada-approved capacity of the ski resort to 8,500 skiers from 6,000. To this end AWA recommended: maintaining the existing daily skier capacity limit of 6,000, restricting summer use of the ski area, and rejecting any expansion or redevelopment of the existing parking facilities at Sunshine. Although a closure of roadway parking for visitors to Sunshine was planned but not implemented for last winter, we understand the closure will apply in the coming year as the operators find alternatives including bus transportation to the ski resort from less congested areas, preferably outside the National Park.

Parks Canada's last assessment of Banff's ecological integrity in 2016 rated it as only "Fair." Although the Park's ecological integrity hadn't declined, it also hadn't improved. AWA believes that Banff has reached and/or exceeded its carrying capacity; the days of more development and growth in Banff should be over if Parks Canada is committed genuinely to respecting the 2010 Banff Management Plan mandate to give "first priority to maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity."

For our Wood Buffalo National Park work, please see the 'Water' section.

## 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 as management plans are developed for the areas which have regional plans developed under the Framework. The 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

## Wild Spaces 2020

The Wild Spaces 2020 campaign will be launched in September 2018, with the goal to ignite support and awareness for Alberta's incredible Wild Spaces. While the protection of Wild Spaces has been part of AWA's vision for more than 50 years, the Wild Spaces 2020 campaign has been brought to life by the newly renewed conservation targets set by the federal and provincial governments. These conservation targets, called the Aichi Targets, were created in 2010 at the Convention for Biological Diversity in Aichi, Japan. Target 11 states that:

"By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures."

The goals of the Wild Spaces 2020 campaign are to highlight all 55 of AWA's areas of concern, featuring their current issues, extraordinary ecological, social and economic values, and how members can support their conservation. In addition to this, we aim to shed light on the imbalance in representative protection between Alberta's Natural Regions, and express the need for increased protection in the Grasslands, Parklands and Canadian Shield Regions.

The launch of the campaign will be accompanied by a series of social media posts describing wild spaces, the Aichi targets, and the need for representative protection. In the fall of 2018,



AWA wrote to the Premier and Minister of Environment and Parks describing the need for the Government to develop plans for 17 percent protection, alongside a public letter writing campaign hosted through the Protected Areas webpage on AWA's website.

## Protected Areas Progress

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 *Alberta Land Reference Manual* provides data on the number and area of provincially protected areas.

Some of the newly protected areas created through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) appear in the data set below. 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.

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

Name				Hectares	Hectares	Hectares
	2018	2017	2016	2018	2017	2016
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	33	32	3,171,506.29	1,811,117.59	1,731,439.59
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	1	1	459,671.04	459,671.04	459,671.04
Provincial Parks	76	77	76	246,797.89	246,864.92	221,363.92
Provincial Recreation Areas	204	203	208	88,602.86	87,692.69	87,891.58
Heritage Rangelands	2	2	2	12,010.47	12,010.47	12,010.47
Natural Areas	138	139	139	129,228.98	129,943.98	129,943.98
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>4,235,649.66</b>	<b>2,875,132.82</b>	<b>2,770,152.71</b>
<b>Section 7 Land</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1450.51</b>	<b>1450.51</b>	<b>1450.51</b>
LARP Commitments not enacted	1	4	4			
SSRP Commitments not enacted	3	3	3		137,735	137,735

## Land-Use Framework

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.

### South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP)

AWA provided input on the continued land-use planning processes in the SSRP. The Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan (LFMP) and Recreation Management Plan



(RMP) were released in early 2018; release of the Biodiversity Management Framework is expected in 2019. AWA believes these plans should establish strict and enforceable limits on land use and linear disturbances within the Livingstone and Porcupine, as well as the South Saskatchewan Region broadly, in order to meet conservation targets.

The SSRP was amended in 2017 after Cabinet approved Orders-in-Council to establish the Castle Provincial Park and expand the Castle Wildland Provincial Park on January 20, 2017. AWA will continue to push for the enactment of the remaining SSRP conservation commitments through Orders in Council formalizing conservation boundaries.

AWA will continue to push for ongoing commitment from the provincial government to establish additional legislated conservation areas, with a priority focus for Grasslands Natural Subregions.

### 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 change in the governing party in May 2015. Consequently, progress on this plan has been slow.

A terms-of-reference document and a 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. AWA was actively involved with staff, board members, and volunteers attending more than half of the Phase I consultation sessions.

In May 2018, the provincial government finally released recommendations made by the NSRAC in 2014. AWA believes that the recommendations fall short of what a thoughtful and comprehensive plan for our public lands will need. The North Saskatchewan Region contains some incredible wild places that should be protected including the Bighorn, critically important river corridors and the last opportunity to conserve the Central Parkland Subregion. The NSRAC recommendations do not protect enough of any of these areas. In addition, the recommendations are lacking any meaningful proposals to tackle the issue of cumulative effects in what is the most highly populated region of the province.

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.

### Lower Athabasca Regional Plan

Northeast Alberta's 'Lower Athabasca region' was the first to have a regional plan approved under the Land Use Framework and *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) was approved in 2012 to manage cumulative impacts of development. In AWA's view, cumulative effects management must be based upon evidence and the precautionary principle to achieve sustainable human activity that maintains and restores healthy ecosystems. AWA continues to seek the completion and strengthening of LARP's elements to stem the ongoing ecological degradation of the region's vital boreal forests, wetlands and waters.



In May 2018, AWA applauded the Alberta government for establishing four large new wildland provincial parks and expanding an existing wildland provincial park in the Lower Athabasca region. Three of the parks, plus the expansion area, had already been identified and managed as wildland parks since the 2012 LARP was approved. Even so, full legal designation was still an important step. We are concerned that Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Park, similarly identified in 2012, was not officially designated. The fourth newly established wildland park, Birch River, will be cooperatively managed by the Alberta government and Tallcree First Nation for economic opportunities compatible with conservation. Alberta has also committed to cooperative management with nearby First Nations for all these parks. AWA believes the First Nations partnerships are an important advance in regional planning and protected areas.

In September 2017, AWA supported Alberta Parks' proposal to consolidate and designate limited motorized trail networks in four Wildland Provincial Parks: Dillon, Stony Mountain, Hubert Lake and La Biche River. This initiative is a positive step to reduce disturbance pressures in these wildland parks, which are intended to retain a remote backcountry character and wilderness values.

LARP sub-regional planning, to manage development within responsible ecological thresholds for public lands, wildlife and waters, has not materialized. To the best of our knowledge, South Athabasca Oil Sands Area sub-regional planning was disbanded. Thanks to the insistence of the Fort McKay First Nation, the most promising sub-regional plan proposal is the February 2018 draft Moose Lake 10 kilometre zone plan: it proposed total and per-industry surface disturbance limits to support goals for intact wildlife habitat. AWA strongly supported the draft plan, but we are concerned it too has stalled.

The Biodiversity strategy section of this report outlines our work to encourage completion of Biodiversity Management Frameworks in regional plans.

### 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.

## Biodiversity

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. In several discussions with policy officials we continue to seek completion of a strong Strategy, but its progress appears to be stalled.

We continue to engage with the Alberta government to urge completion of regional-level biodiversity management frameworks (BMFs). These should apply science-based limits for terrestrial and aquatic indicators of biodiversity. If applied well, the BMFs should help drive



regulatory decisions and management actions to retain intact areas and to restore the often-fragmented habitat on public lands.

The final Land-Footprint Management Plan for southwestern Alberta's Livingstone-Porcupine has committed to the completion of a BMF within one year. This will be important in managing the cumulative effects of spatial human footprint in the region. The Plan states that "the framework will focus on key indicators that represent the broad range of biodiversity in the region. The indicators will reflect species, habitats and the landscapes that sustain long-term ecosystem health (e.g., headwaters areas and existing intact native grasslands). The biodiversity management framework will include the criteria for selecting the indicators." AWA will continue to push for the completion of a strong framework within the next year.

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. From June 2017 to May 2018, AWA was a member of ABMI's multi-sector Steering Committee, which oversaw a 10 year review of its science programs.

In October 2017, AWA organized a webinar for Alberta Environment Network members on BMF status, presented by an Alberta government biodiversity specialist. It included updates about the draft BMFs for the Lower Athabasca, South Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan land-use regions. The presentation summarized the draft indicators and associated thresholds, and provided detailed information on two indicators – for fen wetlands and for 'interior habitats' - and how they could be integrated into a potential cumulative effects management (CEM) pilot by Alberta Environment and Parks and the Alberta Energy Regulator. In June 2018 we discussed with an environmental consultant some ideas that have arisen in indigenous- Alberta government discussions to develop Indigenous indicators for biodiversity. We continue to seek progress to implement regulatory measures to protect and restore biodiversity.

## Indigenous Peoples

This year, AWA continued to participate in the Minister of Indigenous Relations' Calgary consultation sessions, which are reforming the way that Indigenous communities participate in and are consulted on resource development. AWA also appreciated the opportunity to attend a First Nations sub-table meeting within the South Saskatchewan Region. In addition AWA read and reviewed the Indigenous Circle of Experts Report on indigenous protected and conserved areas. In the coming year AWA is seeking to further build understanding in the role that we all play in reconciliation efforts and will increase our efforts on building relationships with indigenous peoples.

## Environmental Laws

In 2015, the federal government promised to restore Canada's environmental protections. It established panels of experts and committees to evaluate Canada's environmental assessment processes, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Navigation Protection Act*, and the National Energy Board. These expert panels held extensive public consultations and presented their recommendations to the government in reports which were open to public review.





Over the past two years AWA has contributed to the review of changes to Canada's environmental laws. In addition to written submissions, we have presented to the Expert Panel that reviewed Canada's federal assessment processes and had the opportunity to meet with the federal Environment Minister to discuss the government's plans for moving forward with reforms to environmental laws and regulatory processes.

In early 2018, the federal government put forward Bills C-68 and C-69 to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (now the *Impact Assessment Act*) and the *Fisheries Act*. Both Bills passed in the House of Commons in June 2018 and will be reviewed by the Senate in the fall.

AWA has serious concerns with the *Impact Assessment Act (IAA)*, including the following:

- The IAA is dangerously lacking structure as to how decisions will be made, relies heavily on Ministerial Discretion, and does not contain any method to appeal decisions. There are no requirements for decision makers to prove that a given project will provide net social and environmental benefits, nor are there explicit criteria for approving or denying a project. There is also no requirement for decision makers to reject projects with unacceptable environmental impacts. Without any objective analysis or decision making criteria, it is likely economic considerations will always be weighed as more important than any negative environmental impacts.
- AWA does not support the continued use of a designated list of projects to trigger assessments. While we understand that the use of a project list is intended to provide clarity to proponents, AWA is concerned that this may result in some unintended omissions and may not consider the impacts of smaller projects. It is not the size of a project that causes it to contribute to the cumulative degradation of the environment. Adding to our concerns is that even with projects on the designated list, the Agency will have discretionary power to decide whether an assessment is required.
- The IAA appears to rely heavily on the continued consideration of cumulative effects largely using a project-by-project approach, with a single project proponent carrying out cumulative effects assessments. This often leads to projects erroneously being "measured against" the effects of other projects, instead of focusing on total environmental effects. Although project-by-project environmental assessments remain important to target site specific environmental impacts, a regional and strategic approach to assess cumulative effects is also essential. Without specific criteria triggering these assessments, AWA is concerned that many important assessments will not be conducted.
- The IAA does not provide participant funding to substitute impact assessments. AWA believes that this provision in the Act is unacceptable and further constrains the ability of the public to participate meaningfully in the assessment process.

As noted above the *Fisheries Act* was also reviewed. The proposed changes seem to strengthen fisheries protection and are largely positive, reincarnating fish habitat protections lost in 2012. However, a great deal hinges on the development of accompanying regulations and policies that further strengthen, not weaken, the *Fisheries Act*. AWA has already commented on proposed changes to Applications for Authorization and will continue to participate in future consultation opportunities.

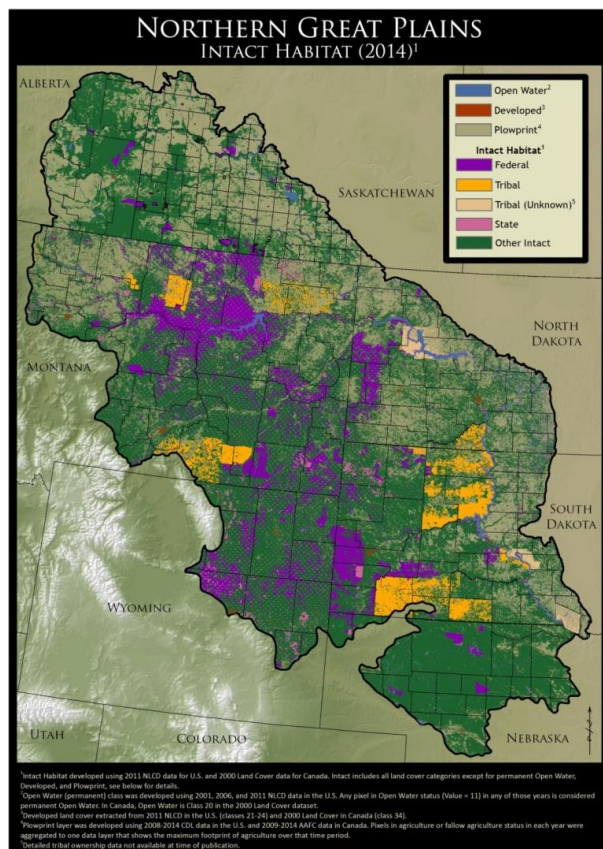


# International Cooperation

## 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 for 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 province of Alberta. 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 Government of Alberta.

AWA hosts and maintains the website for the network at [www.npcn.net](http://www.npcn.net).

### **Transboundary Grasslands Workshop**

The Transboundary Grasslands Workshop has been held three times and a fourth workshop is being planned for December 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 trans-boundary grassland initiatives across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana and helps all those concerned with grasslands conservation become familiar with the broad scope of work and accomplishments of large landscape conservation trans-boundary collaborative. 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.



## OUTREACH

### Wild Lands Advocate

The Wild Lands Advocate (WLA) is AWA's news journal; it provides information and perspectives on Alberta's wilderness in order to facilitate conservation through awareness and action. Its information is crucial to informing public debate in Alberta and inspiring the people of this province to care about the health of our landscapes and ecosystems.

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 in its conservation, through investigation and personal accounts in a visually attractive and accessible style. Its four issues per year, which are free to all members, provide timely, accurate, interesting, and useful information to AWA supporters and the general public on issues pertaining to Alberta's wilderness and AWA's work. AWA staff takes ownership and leadership for articles in the WLA. During the past year the features section of the magazine offered readers informed commentary on issues such as: recovering native trout populations, provincial land-use plans for the Livingstone-Porcupine, the Castle parks, the status of efforts to recover Alberta's woodland caribou populations, and the costs and liabilities associated with cleaning up tar sands projects at the end of their lives. Combined with nature-inspired art, poetry, and book reviews, the magazine alone is well-worth the cost of a membership in the Alberta Wilderness Association and provides a valuable outreach tool to engage and inspire people about wilderness and wildlife in Alberta.

### 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.

AWA has begun the work of overhauling and updating AWA's main website AlbertaWilderness.ca by reorganizing the website layout and creating/updating webpages for all 55 Area of Concern. As part of AWA's *Wild Spaces 2020* campaign (see *Protected Areas – Provincial* for more detail), AWA will promote its Areas of Concern by highlighting them on our social media platforms and driving the public to accurate and informative materials on our website.

AWA has two primary websites:

- [www.AlbertaWilderness.ca](http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca) (major information and resource site)
- [www.ClimbforWilderness.ca](http://www.ClimbforWilderness.ca) (Earth Day event site)

and single issue websites:

- [www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com](http://www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com)
- [www.caribou4ever.ca](http://www.caribou4ever.ca)



As of January 2018, AWA has transitioned our electronic newsletter service to Mailchimp to deliver important messages to members, supporters and those who have self-selected to be on the lists. AWA adheres to the Canadian Anti Spam Legislation. Our three subscriber lists are:

Media – 177 subscribers

Climb for Wilderness - 3,923 subscribers

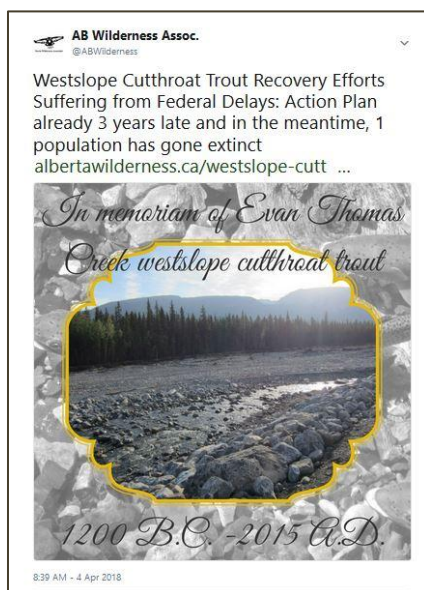
Alberta Wilderness Association – 2,220 subscribers

## Social media

AWA maintains a social media presence with two Facebook pages (users @AlbertaWilderness and @Climb4Wild), 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.

Throughout the past year, AWA has worked on building our social media presence and has experienced the following growth on each platform:

- **Facebook:** Increase from 1,900 page likes from Dec. 2017 to 2,250 page likes in August 2018 with consistent reach.
- **Twitter:** An increase from 2000 followers in December 2017 to 2200 followers in August 2018. There were several tweets which reached over 1,500 people. The top tweet over the year received 2,218 impressions and 48 engagements:



- **Instagram:** A doubling in followers, from 440 in December 2017 to 850 in August of 2018.
- **Climb for Wilderness:** An increase in 100 followers on the Climb for Wilderness Facebook page to a total of 365 likes. Over 17,500 people were reached on the event page with 275 people listed as “going” to the event. Currently at 560 followers on the Climb for Wilderness Twitter Account.

Social media has become a reasonably cost effective and efficient way to develop brand recognition and increase AWA’s reach to interested and engaged people. It provides a digital platform for outreach and messaging of important news.



During summer 2018 we restarted the Caribou4Ever campaign with three key efforts:

1. A flag campaign that encouraged supporters to design caribou flags to be hung at the office and used with social media.
2. A social media campaign with a consistent theme encouraging people to send the online letter through [caribou4ever.ca](http://caribou4ever.ca).
3. Our first AWA “After Hours” event at Born Colorado Brewery focusing on caribou and featuring Carolyn Campbell speaking about caribou to 35 guests.

The flags and social media were used in combination throughout the summer to raise awareness of the Caribou4Ever website and the letter writing campaign. Response was varied throughout the summer, but many letters were written, and it attracted names like photographer John Marriott who generously prompted his own followers to take part in the campaign. A number of elementary schools as well as members of the community contributed to the flag project.

The use of MailChimp to ask members to write letters on caribou proved to be successful. Two campaigns were sent under the AWA account asking members to send a letter as well as a feature as part of the *C4W Stories* initiative. In all cases, a spike in letters occurred following the e-mails.

*Canva* was useful tool in ensuring the caribou campaign had a consistent design. The focus for the social media was to include simple messages with impact about the state of caribou in Alberta. Clear numbers like “65% habitat protection” and “every 8 years caribou populations decline by 50%” attracted responses on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The most successful post ended up being about the loss of the caribou herd in Banff.

The “AWA After Hours” event on September 25 at Born Colorado Brewery was the final event in the summer caribou campaign. This experiment was successful, attracting 35 people who made caribou flags and asked conservation specialist Carolyn Campbell questions about caribou. Born Colorado was happy with the event and donated money as well as the space to AWA.

## Hikes

AWA's hikes program is an important component of AWA's outreach work, introducing the public to the natural beauty of wilderness areas and educating them about the key issues within a given area. With hikes held across the province, it is also a means for keeping in contact with the local community that lives in and around AWA's areas of concern. Hikes are also a platform for introducing important areas that may be less well known and engaging hikers about AWA's conservation work. This year AWA held hikes in the Ghost, the Whaleback, Nose Hill Park (Calgary), Porcupine Hills, Wainwright Dunes and Crowsnest Pass. All hikes were well received due to the tremendous efforts of many dedicated AWA volunteers, and were wonderful opportunities to 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.

## Talks

AWA's speaker series continues with excellent presentations that are well attended, creating opportunities to learn more about AWA's work and discuss a broad range of environmental topics throughout the province.



The 2017/2018 Calgary speakers included:

- Peter Sherrington: *The Rocky Mountain Eagle Foundation: The First 25 Years*
- Susan Holroyd: *A Citizen-Centered Approach to Bat Conservation*
- Dale Portman & Kathy Calvert: *Ya Ha Tinda – A Home Place*
- Dale Leckie: *Geology of the Rocky Mountain National Parks*
- Gus Yaki: *Trekking Across Southern Alberta*
- Nirmala Naidoo: *Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan*
- Nick Pink, AWA: *Public Lands*
- University of Calgary Students: *Water Quality and Wildlife*

AWA also had the pleasure of hosting the Calgary film screening of “*Last Stand: The Vanishing Caribou Rainforest*”.

The 2017/2018 Edmonton speakers included:

- Dr. Lee Foote: *Wetlands Reclamation in the Oil Sands – Meager knowledge meets tremendous challenge*
- Dr. Kevin Timoney: *An Overview of Energy Industry Spills in Alberta*
- Nick Pink, AWA: *Public Lands*

AWA thanks the Wildbird General Store and Jackson Power for their support of the 2017/2018 Edmonton season and we look forward to an exciting *Talks* season across Alberta in the coming year.

### Music for the Wild

AWA's Music for the Wild series combines a celebration of music and Alberta's wildlife and wild spaces. It aims to broaden AWA's community outreach and messaging by drawing in a demographic of the population that may not be familiar with AWA's work. The 2017/2018 season marked the 10<sup>th</sup> year of this program and in celebration, the four evenings each featured two headlining acts, bringing in over 200 attendees. The musicians praise our wonderfully attentive audiences and the intimate setting of the Hillhurst Cottage School. Each evening includes a short introduction to AWA and a story about a current conservation activity. These fun evenings have brought an appreciation of AWA's wilderness work to a wide-ranging audience. AWA looks forward to a successful season in 2018/2019 and thanks our steadfast volunteers, George Campbell and Murray Little, for continuing to put together and run this fabulous series.

### Earth Day – Climb for Wilderness

For the 2018 Climb for Wilderness, we undertook several initiatives to solidify our relationship with community sponsors, increase social media impact, and diversify our reach through traditional media and social media.

In working with our sponsors, we made it a priority to communicate with them and ensure that they were represented on social media while reaching out to new businesses and organizations in the community to encourage them to participate. Some notable first-time sponsors were the Calgary International Blues Festival and Strides Running Store. CIBF donated two festival passes while Strides donated \$150 in gift certificates.



As part of the social media representation, the Smoky mascot was used to show the prizes alongside more traditional promotions. Smoky was used throughout as the face of our general campaign and managed to attract positive feedback from our followers.

Using Smoky allowed us to create a narrative for the campaign, creating continuity in our posts. This allowed us to tell the story of the Climb through one consistent entity. We saw a positive trend in numbers with the Climb Facebook page gaining over 100 followers to 365 and the Twitter staying consistent around 560 followers. The AWA Instagram account also benefitted from the campaign and has seen its number double to nearly 900 followers since the campaign. We maintained our place in all the events calendars we had been featured in during previous campaigns and contacted all the major news outlets in Calgary. A great success was having one of our young climbers and her mother being featured on the Calgary Eyeopener, CBC's morning radio program on the morning of the Climb. We also partnered with Date Night YYC, who created and undertook a campaign for us which garnered a sizeable response.

We believe that our increased focus on social media and outreach played a part in keeping the donation numbers for the Climb consistent with past years despite the total number of participants dropping by about 20%. Participants were engaged and had an awareness of AWA and our projects which was helped by our increased social media presence.

To keep participants engaged with AWA in between Climbs, we have started a new e-mail series called *C4W Stories*. This series highlights AWA initiatives in a way that shows participants how their donations are helping us do our important conservation work. Overall the response so far has been positive.

### 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 three student practicum for students from SAIT and another from Robertson College 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 Brand Recognition

A year long program Small Budget, Big Impact provided by the Calgary Foundation offered time to plan, learn new strategies and review corporate policies related to brand, marketing and promotion. As part of implementing what was learned, AWA reviewed AWA's logo and based on comments from supporters updated the logo to be more consistent in font and reduce the stylized appearance of the owl to be closer to a true representation. The owl logo is an appreciated and recognized symbol of AWA's basic strengths and qualities of wisdom, higher knowledge and as guardians of our wild spaces.



Alberta Wilderness Association





# Strength and Capacity

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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 for Wilderness, and the Wild West Saloon. AWA has 119 active volunteers at the time of writing this report.

## **Roger Creasey 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.

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.

## **AWA's Cottage School**

AWA's Cottage School has been a busy place this year with opportunities to host partners AGM's and programs. Depending on the event and users, we sometimes charge 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, a majority of the neighbours requested alley paving and while we did not sign on in agreement, we now have a paved alley that we will pay for over the period of a number of years. General maintenance and upkeep for the building is ongoing. The installation of solar panels to provide some of our electricity is being planned for this year.



## Financing Wilderness Protection

Funds received from donations by members, supporters and fundraising efforts are vital to the health of AWA and provided 83% (2016-2017 - 87%) of our total revenue. Granting agencies in this year included Alberta Government Recreation and Physical Activity Division, ECO Canada, Bow River Basin Council, The Calgary Foundation, The Harmony Foundation and the United Nations Green Corp Program. Funding generated through events came from our annual Earth Day event Climb for Wilderness and the Wild West Saloon in the fall. Shell Canada, Ghostpine Environmental and Bellatrix Exploration provided sponsorship for the Wild West Saloon. A more detailed presentation thanking our corporate supporters largely 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 without risk of compromise as a result of funding considerations. We continue to work on our target to strengthen our financial reserve. We have begun a fund for building maintenance and repair.

AWA devoted 76% (2016-2017 - 77%) 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 12.5% (2016-2017 - 12%) represent an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism.

Our voting membership has grown in the past year and stands at 5,792 (2017 - 5,553) individuals; representing 211 (2017 - 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 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. In addition donations tend to be seasonal but 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 make a significant difference to our long-term security and our ability to plan for the future. We have prepared an information sheet, readily available on our website to assist those interested in planning a gift for AWA.



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

## AWA's Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors

*Dorothy Berry & the Berndt Family*  
*Clint and Julie Docken*  
*Lorne Fitch*  
*Anthony and Liz Fricke*  
*Bruce and Eveline Goodall*  
*Donna Hammerlindl*  
*Chris and Ken Havard*  
*Laura Jackson*  
*Linda and Jusuf Javeri*  
*Mary Kettenbach*  
*Diane and Kevin Mihalcheon*  
*Glen and Lois Mumey*  
*Rosemary Nation*  
*Christyann Olson*  
*Richard and Vivian Pharis*  
*Chris and Jennifer Saunders*  
*Joe Vipond and Family*  
*Cliff and Terry Wallis*



## Memorial Tributes

Memorial tributes made by family and friends remember those we have lost and contribute to AWA's strength. AWA remembers them here in our Annual Report and in our hearts. The list below reflects recent losses and in some cases, a memory of those who made an impact on our lives and are missed years later.

### Donations in Memoriam 2017 – 2018

Brian Staszewski 1951-2017  
 Herb Kariel 1927-2017  
 Ron Wetherill 1940-2016,  
 Lewis Ramstead 1935-2017  
 Ruth Moir 1921-2017  
 Max Winkler 1931-2017  
 Orval Pall 1951 - 1986  
 Sharon Tranter 1940-2013  
 Cyrus Spaulding 1956-2017  
 Eileen & Jack Van Tighem  
 David Manzer & Murray Manzer  
 Charles A. Miller 1921-2009  
 Helen MacLean 1927-2017  
 Ian Ross 1959-2003  
 Edwin Thomas 1920-2008  
 Roger Creasy 1953-2015  
 Nancy Hanks 1925-2017  
 Donald Baker 1927-2018  
 Ole West 1947-2018  
 Therese Conway 1931-2018  
 Vjekoslav Gorec 1938-2018  
 Carmell Bokvist 1972-2018  
 Charles Tuckey 1958-2018  
 Ted Davy 1926-2017  
 Kitty Rosengren 1930-2018  
 Dick Pharis 1937-2018  
 Ray Sloan 1941-1995  
 P.K. Anderson 1927-2014  
 Dick Pharis 1937-2018  
 Troy Hommy 1962-2018  
 Chris Havard 1945-2015  
 Del Lavalley 1924-2018  
 Weslyn Mather 1945 - 2015  
 Joan (2009) & Mel (2008) Dunford



## 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:

Ruth Bell  
 Spencer Waterhouse  
 Lara & Johanna Buchmann  
 Kirsten & David Pugh  
 Cheryl Bradley  
 Rick Keillor  
 Patricia Hommy  
 Dr. Lindsay McLaren  
 Winnifred Lehman  
 Gus Yaki

## Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust is a permanent endowment fund for Alberta's wilderness and in time it can become an integral part of wilderness for tomorrow. We hope the fund will grow over the generations to come and that years from today, the 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. In time, 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 \$28,043 (2017 - \$26,880). The endowment fund's annual distribution \$1,122. (2017 - \$1,097.) is dedicated to the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture and the Wilderness Defender Awards.

## Alberta 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 2017 lecture was given by Chris Turner. Chris challenged a full house last November giving members an insight into the future for climate change, conservation, and cities. An article, about Chris Turner’s Martha Kostuch Annual Lecture was published in the March 2018 *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 Colleen and Dylan Biggs and Reg Ernst.

Raised with conservation mindsets, Colleen and Dylan have been advocates who walk the talk to bring environmental issues into the hearts and homes of Canadians. Whether it was marching in the streets to save Haida Gwaii in years past or running TK Ranch today, they advocate positive change and protect human and natural history with a practical, environmental and solution focused ethic. Their ranch on rare native northern fescue grasslands exemplifies the stewardship and care they bring to the land, to the animals they raise, and to the wildlife that shares their special place in the *middle of everywhere*, Alberta.

The natural beauty and native plant communities of the alpine meant that for years we could find Reg with the *Flora of Alberta* under his arm, exploring and documenting rare plants somewhere in the Castle Wilderness. Reg has created awareness of the threat of invasive species to these native plants and has been instrumental in a number of studies and projects focused on protection. Motivated by a sense of duty, that the work he was doing was something he felt he was obliged to do, he has helped many others learn, saved more than a rattlesnake or two and added to the records of rare and endangered plants in Alberta.

### 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. In 2017 we honoured longstanding and dedicated volunteer Kevin Mihalcheon.

Kevin is one of our volunteers who came to AWA, as many of our volunteers do, because his wife was part of our staff. He is a Great Gray Owl in so many ways, arriving with a degree of stealth, taking on his tasks and you hardly realize he is there until you look up and there is a camera pointing at you! His support for our events and any time we need a special shot of someone or something, we can and have counted on Kevin for years. He is an ambassador for AWA through the images he creates, he makes people smile and thrills them when he has a special photo to share that shows them participating and supporting AWA. He will spend hours being sure we have the very best he can offer and never says no – always cheerfully, with dedication, and determination being a vital part of building our historical archive.

### *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*



*Great Horned Owl Alberta's Provincial bird and the symbol of AWA's strengths and qualities of wisdom, higher knowledge and guardians of our wild spaces. Photo © C. Olson*

