

# Protected Areas: The Ambitions of Wild Spaces 2020 and the Aichi Targets.

The theme of protected areas figures prominently in this issue of *Wild Lands Advocate*. This fall marks the launch of AWA's "Wild Spaces 2020" campaign. Grace Wark's opening article in this issue introduces you to that campaign, to AWA's intentions to highlight 55 outstanding wild spaces and to encourage governments to incorporate them into an expanded protected areas network.

This campaign follows on the heels of a renewed protected areas commitment from the federal and Alberta governments. That commitment was first outlined in 2010 when Canada embraced the global biodiversity targets agreed to at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the 1992 United Nations Convention on Biodiversity. The 2010 meetings were held in Japan's Aichi prefecture and the biodiversity targets set there in the 2011-2020 strategic plan for biodiversity are known as the "Aichi targets."

For Canada, implementing Aichi means meeting a variety of targets. Canada's "Target 1" is to conserve at least 17 percent of the country's landscapes and 10 percent of Canadian coastal and marine areas by...2020. Today, Canada has conserved 10.5 percent and 7.7 percent of those respective areas. There is much to do, in other words, in a very short period of time.

Our second features article, by Joanna Skrajny and Grace Wark, describes one ambitious

aspect of the Canadian approach to satisfying its Aichi obligations – the intention to follow the advice of the Indigenous Circle of Experts and include the country's First Nations as genuine partners in this conservation campaign. It also details the concerns of a second advisory group, the National Advisory Panel, that the Canadian approach address "representativeness," the fact that many of this country's ecosystems are not represented adequately in the country's protected areas network. If governments take this deficiency seriously, it could be very good news for grossly underrepresented ecosystems in Alberta such as our grasslands, parkland, and foothills.

Nissa Petterson's piece on the Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park south of Hinton may be viewed as an important reminder that, in addition to creating protected areas, governments must ensure that park users respect the rules governing access to those areas. Nissa's article on grizzly bear management reflects the link between biodiversity and protected landscapes that is at the heart of the UN Convention and the Aichi targets. If governments don't ensure secure habitat for wildlife then biodiversity objectives may be threatened.

Mai-Linh Huynh's examination of Alberta's wetlands policy in the Green Area is very troubling. There she details how the tar sands industry has received extensive exemptions from following the wetlands policy the gov-

ernment introduced in 2013. These lands, much of which are sacrificed to extract bitumen, will remain anything but protected from industrialization.

My contribution to the protected areas theme in our Features section is to draw attention to a development that may threaten the goal of greater ecosystem representativeness in Alberta. The development considered is the explosive growth of utility-scale renewable energy projects in the province. Albertans can have both a greener energy grid and stronger protections in our grasslands, parkland, and foothills natural regions. But, such a desirable "win-win" will take more leadership from Alberta than we have thus far seen.

You will also find this theme in Andrea Johancsik's story about paddling the Red Deer River – its valley is a long-standing area of concern for AWA. The protected areas theme also is complemented by our interview with Dave Mayhood, one of this year's Wilderness Defender award recipients, in our updates on Alberta caribou and American grizzlies, and in the review of the Kiesecker/Naugle book on energy sprawl.

Finally, this issue bids farewell to Dick Pharis who passed away this summer. Dick was a founding member of AWA and his life was synonymous with the pursuit of protecting wild spaces.

*-Ian Urquhart, Editor*

