

2013-2014 Annual Report

Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action



Alberta Wilderness Association

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2013 - 2014



© Alberta Wilderness Association
Box 6398, Station D, Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E1

Provincial Office – Hillhurst Cottage School
455 – 12 St NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1Y9

Phone 403.283.2025 • Fax 403.270.2743
Email: awa@abwild.ca
Web server: AlbertaWilderness.ca

Contributions to the Annual Report by
AWA board and staff members
are gratefully acknowledged.

COVER PHOTO – WATERTON PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAN OLSON

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WILDERNESS FOR TOMORROW	8
WHO WE ARE	10
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	11
STAFF	12
MISSION, VISION, VALUES, OBJECTIVES	13
Vision.....	13
Values.....	14
Objectives.....	14
WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP AND OUTREACH.....	15
Conservation	15
WILD SPACES – AWA AREAS AND ISSUES OF CONCERN	16
Wild Alberta Map.....	17
AREAS OF CONCERN	18
Boreal Region	18
Primrose-Lakeland	18
McClelland Lake	18
Hay-Zama	19
Peace River	20
Bistcho.....	20
Caribou Mountains.....	20
Rocky Mountain Region	22
Willmore Wilderness Park.....	22
Kakwa	22
Bighorn Wildland.....	23
Crown of the Continent Ecosystem	24
South Ghost – Ghost-Waiparous.....	24
Kananaskis Country	24
Castle Wildland	25
Livingstone-Porcupine.....	26
Waterton Parkland.....	28
Parkland Region	29
Rumsey.....	29
Wainwright Dunes.....	29
Grasslands Region	29
Middle Sand Hills.....	29
Suffield National Wildlife Area	29
Milk River-Sage Creek	30
Cypress Hills.....	31
Pakowki Lake	31
Milk River Ridge.....	31
Milk River Management Committee.....	32
Prairie Conservation Forum	32
Foothills Restoration Forum.....	32
ISSUES	33
Water	33

Forests.....	33
Grizzly Bears.....	35
Caribou.....	36
Greater Sage-grouse.....	37
Black Bears.....	38
Wolves.....	38
Game Farming.....	39
Feral Horses.....	39
GOVERNMENT POLICY.....	40
Public Lands.....	41
Tax-Recovery Lands.....	41
Protected Areas - Provincial.....	41
Protected Areas - Federal.....	41
Land-Use Framework (LUF).....	42
Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP).....	42
South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP).....	43
North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP).....	44
Wetland Policy.....	45
Water for Life.....	45
Biodiversity Strategy.....	46
Species at Risk.....	46
Federal Species at Risk Act (SARA).....	46
Greater Sage-grouse.....	47
Westslope Cutthroat Trout.....	47
Limber / Whitebark Pine.....	48
Other Specis at Risk.....	48
PROTECTED AREAS PROGRESS.....	49
Alberta’s Provincially Protected Areas.....	49
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.....	50
Commission for Environmental Cooperation.....	50
Temperate Grassland Conservation.....	50
Northern Plains Conservation Network.....	50
Twinning of Two Significant International Ramsar Sites.....	51
STRENGTH AND CAPACITY.....	52
Wild Lands Advocate.....	52
Alberta Wilderness Resource Centre.....	52
Online Presence.....	53
Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Defenders.....	54
Hikes, Talks, Films and Tours Outreach Program.....	54
Music for the Wild.....	55
Summer Wilderness Defenders Kids’ Camp.....	55
Earth Day - Climb and Run for Wilderness and the Wild Alberta Expo.....	55
Hillhurst Cottage School.....	56
Community Relationships.....	56
International Migratory Bird Day.....	56
FINANCING WILDERNESS PROTECTION.....	57
Revenue.....	57
Expenditures.....	57

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE LEGACY CIRCLE	59
Bequests.....	59
Wilderness and Wildlife Bequests.....	59
Lifetime Giving	59
Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors.....	59
Memorial Tributes.....	60
Donations in Memoriam 2009-2010	60
Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust.....	60
Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Trust Guest Lecture	61
Wilderness Defenders Awards.....	61
Great Gray Owl Awards.....	61
HOPE FOR TOMORROW	62

WILDERNESS FOR TOMORROW

Autumn, a favourite month for so many has been wonderfully showy this year with crisp mornings and warm afternoons, colours galore and good gusts of wind blowing leaves of every shade of yellow, orange and red from the trees to create a magical shifting carpet on the ground. It does remind us how fortunate we are, how wonderful our wild spaces are and how important AWA's role is in creating a diverse and healthy wilderness legacy.

Conservation success depends on all of us, our awareness, our conversations, our neighbours, our financial help, our caring concern for places and wildlife and our untiring support for AWA. As we close the fiscal year we pause to reflect on the past 12 months and document our progress.

I had a call from a member a few weeks ago that still troubles me as he feels so strongly that we are not making any progress. That the constant struggle does not show progress on the map, that there is no concrete measure of what we have achieved. It is true there is little on the map that shows the difference we are all making. If we compare ourselves to other jurisdictions we might be able to see more hectares, more diverse protective measures in place and we can feel easily feel a sense of discouragement by a system that is so highly political in Alberta that those civil servants at every level *who actually care* are grasping for tools and direction to do what they know must be done.

We do know that there are always those jurisdictions who are seemingly better or worse off and what we must do is look closely at what we have managed to achieve; examine how others made concrete progress and see how we can do better. We must not settle for less than what we need but recognize there are better ways of doing things and we can learn and we can help others learn.

Wildlife are at the heart of our vision; the network - the ability to roam freely, the unconditional desire to have and keep true wilderness vital, without human interference and protected - forever.

Phone calls from members who care mean a great deal to us and we do listen and try to understand the perspectives you have as we make our way through some pretty tough processes and discouraging days. Among our members and volunteers, there are leaders and there are followers and I offer my thanks to each one of you for all you do.

A good example of the sort of long-term, strategic thinking that we need is provided by Hay Zama. In 2008, we were fortunate to move forward and celebrate the Twinning of Dalai Lakes in Inner Mongolia with Hay Zama Lakes in northwest Alberta. Vitaly important international Ramsar sites, delegates from Inner Mongolia visited here and in turn we visited them.

The story of Hay Zama Lakes began in the 1960s and it is one of disagreement, tumultuous negotiation, communication, cooperation and in the end collaboration. It is a story of dedicated professionals, First Nations and conservationists who knew there could be a better way to extract the resource and protect the precious wetlands and the migratory birds and wildlife so dependent on them.

It was industry that invited AWA to the table, and the process, while government was at the table, was not led by government. The people involved through the years were visionary. What evolved through years of meetings, not meeting, disagreeing and coming together was a memorandum of understanding between all the parties. An agreement to create a Wildland Park with existing industrial activity operating under a time certain life cycle. Spills and unsafe conditions were rectified, new standards for

operating were implemented, up to date technology was employed and an agreement was made that by 2017 all oil and gas activity would be completed.

Throughout the years there were tempting times and as companies changed hands and hoped to bargain for more time, all parties remained strong and true to the memorandum. It is a success story; a model of how we can work in this province to see the best outcomes, not at the risk of losing caribou, sage-grouse or grizzlies - but **with the promise of not losing them**. With the promise to work together to find solutions and to accept that there are some things so precious we may not be able to do all we might want on some landscapes.

And so it is - a model that has worked so well, that in time for AWA's 50 birthday in 2015, the oil and gas activity in Hay Zama Lakes will be completed - at least 2 years early. We all have a world class, intact Wildland Park that is a legacy for generations to come because we could work together. Thanks to all those who made a difference in this success story and helped us know a way to work together and achieve our common vision for a wild and free Alberta. You have helped us know we can apply this model in other parts of Alberta and given us hope to continue trying despite how hard some days are.

The following pages of our annual report will give you sense of the breadth of our work and the passion and dedication your AWA team brings each day. I had the good fortune to be on the plains this week, incredible skies and an unending 360 degree horizon, a soft breeze in the tall grass and good folks living on the land and caring for it. I give thanks for the wonderful clear, blue skies and Alberta's fresh air, for the solid ground and incredible landscapes we walk on, crystal clear bountiful life-giving water and for our families, friends and colleagues who make a difference to all we do every day.

Whether Wild Alberta means to you that we will have a sustainable economy, an unparalleled spiritual retreat, a fully functioning ecosystem or the basic assurance of a healthy environment, the interest and support of AWA members and supporters is what helps us make a difference every day. Thank you!

Christyann Olson, Executive Director



Grasslands Sunflower photographed by Andy Teucher

WHO WE ARE

*“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.” - Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder**

Each year as we consider the past year and the achievements of Alberta Wilderness Association, we are reminded of how fortunate we are.

We have a nine-member (soon to be a ten-member) Board of Directors. The Directors truly care about AWA.

We have a wonderful Executive Director, Christyann Olson, who leads AWA and continues to build a foundation of solid administrative practices and to lead and inspire her staff.

We have a superb conservation staff, Carolyn Campbell, Brittany Verbeek, Sean Nichols and Ian Urquhart and, who research, investigate, cooperate, collaborate and in some circumstances are at the forefront of some difficult but necessary strategies to push forward progressive and protective actions. Diane Mihalcheon and Cindy Ralston are vital to the team, providing administrative support for the staff in their day-to-day work.

We are also blessed by having a very supportive membership located all over Alberta. Our members are the life blood of the Association. We salute their engagement in selfless action that contributes to the welfare of Alberta’s wild spaces. We are grateful for how much they give to AWA in volunteer time and in money. We hope that our members are also giving back to themselves by taking the time to get outside and enjoy the gift that is Alberta’s wild spaces. As Khalil Gibran wrote in *The Prophet*, “And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.”

Richard Secord
President
27 October 2014

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President:	Richard Secord, Edmonton
First Vice-President:	Owen McGoldrick, Calgary
Second Vice-President:	Cliff Wallis, Calgary
Secretary/Treasurer:	Frank Calder, Edmonton
Directors:	Vivian Pharis, Cochrane Clint Docken, Bragg Creek Chris Saunders, Calgary Jim Campbell, Calgary Gail Docken, Edmonton
Director Emeritus:	Herbert G. Kariel, Calgary

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. We are fortunate to have a full complement of board members based on this approach to creating a governance board. Elections for the board are held annually at the Annual General Meeting.



Jim Campbell, Clint Docken, Gail Docken,
Owen McGoldrick, Cliff Wallis,
Vivian Pharis, Chris Saunders
(missing Richard Secord, Frank Calder)

Photo Kevin Mihalcheon

STAFF

Executive Director:	Christyann Olson, BN, MSc
Conservation Specialists:	Carolyn Campbell, BA, BEd, MA, MBA Sean Nichols, BSc Brittany Verbeek, BSc
Wild Lands Advocate Editor:	Ian Urquhart, PhD
Administrative Associates:	Diane Mihalcheon Cindy Ralston

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



MISSION, VISION, VALUES, OBJECTIVES

Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action

For more than 45 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 198 Alberta communities and around the world who care about protecting the province's wild places. During this year membership growth has stabilized and new targets will be set in the coming fiscal year.

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

VISION

Protected Wilderness

There will be a comprehensive system of protected wild areas.

Decision-making Society

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

Effective and Credible Advocates

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

Independent

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

VALUES

Ecocentredness

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

Integrity

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

Respectfulness

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

Participation

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

Tenacity

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

Passion

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

OBJECTIVES

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

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

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

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

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

WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH

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

AWA’s board of directors and staff have developed 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 who are research and administrative associates.

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 politically on issues concerning wilderness conservation in the province.

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

CONSERVATION

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

Critical ecosystems for some species are in jeopardy. With only 14 male greater sage-grouse remaining in Alberta time is running out for this iconic species; it is an indicator of other species at risk. With less than 1% of our native prairie designated and legally protected, our challenge has been to increase awareness and help decision makers understand the urgency of our present day circumstances. We have taken action on a number of fronts including sage-grouse, caribou, grizzly bears and several priority areas of concern. While we have focused on these priorities, work and achievements in other areas of concern has continued. We have remained strong in our messaging on conservation, on the protection of biodiversity and in the power of the people.

WILD SPACES – AWA AREAS AND ISSUES OF CONCERN

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



Parkland fireweed photographed by Cliff Wallis

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 plan for AWA. This map has evolved through the years from initial hand-drawn “bubbles” to today’s more refined version that uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to detail known critical values, including Environmentally Significant Areas (ESA) in Alberta’s landscapes. Connectivity and the network are vital elements as we look to see the best of what is left; what can be restored and what is still pristine and can be true wilderness supporting vital life-giving ecosystems.

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

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

Wild Alberta



AREAS OF CONCERN

BOREAL REGION

PRIMROSE-LAKELAND

The diverse topography and waterways of Primrose-Lakeland in the boreal central mixedwood region of northeast Alberta provides excellent habitat for many mammals, birds and amphibians. A relatively small area is currently designated as a Provincial Park and Recreation Area, although there is no approved management plan to ensure wilderness protection is a priority. Meanwhile, intensive in situ oil sands and other development pressures are increasing in adjacent areas. AWA's vision is for a significantly larger connected area to be formally protected, with a management plan to emphasize sustainable low impact tourism and recreation to conserve its significant biodiversity.

In early summer, AWA and its members participated in Alberta Parks' public consultation on their proposal to build fixed roof cabins in Alberta's only backcountry canoe circuit in Lakeland Provincial Park. In AWA's view, the cabins will increase mechanized access pressures and be a step towards urbanizing this relatively non-mechanized area. They are completely unnecessary given numerous nearby alternatives for fixed roof RV camping and rental cabins in rustic lakeside settings. We await Parks' decision.

Thanks to local residents' concerns, AWA also issued an Action Alert for the Garner Orchid Fen Natural Area. These beautiful, ecologically significant groundwater-fed wetlands are threatened by a proposed nearby residential development. We thanked Lac La Biche County Council for postponing a re-zoning decision in order to further consider environmental impacts to the Garner Orchid Fen, and urged stronger long-term protection of this important Natural Area. As part of our Hikes program, AWA members participated in another exploratory walk in the Garner Orchid Fen in June 2014.

This year our monitoring of oil sands operations in the region was dominated by concerns over four uncontrolled blowouts to surface of toxic steamed bitumen at CNRL's Primrose tar sands in situ project. We participated in an August 2013 media site tour, generating eyewitness accounts of impacts and concerns in subsequent *Wild Lands Advocate* articles. We followed up with federal and provincial authorities on wildlife and water impacts. Through media outreach we helped bring broader attention to the need for stronger regulatory oversight of highly pressurized bitumen steaming considering the geological weakness of the collapsing salts formation in that area, and considering that the root causes of a similar 2009 blowout were never identified or managed.

MCCLELLAND LAKE

AWA's vision is for the entire 330 km² McClelland watershed to be designated a Provincial Park, with its two large patterned fens designated Ecological Reserves. The McClelland Lake Wetland Complex is one of Alberta's exceptional wetlands, both ecologically and physically significant. Located 85 km north of Fort McMurray, it supports rare plants and provides a stopover point and breeding grounds for many

bird species along one of North America's major migratory flyways. If responsibly protected, it would be one of the few intact wetland complexes left in the industrialized mineable oil sands region, whose landscape was once wetland-dominant.

AWA strongly opposes plans by Suncor, Total and Teck Resources to mine the upper half of the McClelland Lake wetland complex watershed for the Fort Hills tar sands mine project. This will destroy the topography and soils that sustain groundwater flows into the rest of the watershed, and will very likely destroy the un-mined portion of the wetland complex including the Lake. We will continue to raise awareness about these unacceptable plans.

In related work, AWA has been supporting biodiversity management framework and conservation offset development work in northeast Alberta. We continue to request wetland policy development that does not unfairly devalue irreplaceable boreal peatlands because of their current 'abundance'. We have also continued to raise awareness about impacts to migratory birds from tailings ponds, and the importance of remaining intact wetlands in the oil sands mining area. This work should benefit McClelland Lake and other boreal wetlands.

HAY-ZAMA

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

As an active member of the Hay-Zama Committee (which includes representatives from the First Nations community, government, Ducks Unlimited, and the energy industry) AWA continues to work with this committee and is pleased to see resource extraction winding down. AWA promotes the Hay-Zama Committee's consensus-based, collaborative process as a model for phasing out industrial activities within protected areas and had opportunities this year to promote this model in other areas of the province.

In accordance with the 2008 MOU twinning Hay-Zama lakes with Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), AWA continues to press the Alberta Government to honour its commitments to the Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve. Staffing issues related to the remoteness of this Alberta treasure have made continuity in support and communications with our IMAR colleagues difficult. We are disappointed by the government's inability to provide consistent staffing resources for Hay-Zama Wildland Park and while the Minister of Tourism Parks and Recreation intended that a staff member would be in place in 2014 we have no confirmation that appointment was made.

On a positive note, oil and gas activities that still persist in a small portion of the wetland complex are winding down with a complete shutdown of operations in 2014 a full three years early! The focus now will be on site reclamation.

PEACE RIVER

Alberta's Peace River Valley is ecologically significant for many reasons. The valley's south-facing slopes still retain important prairie and parkland vegetation, which has been virtually destroyed elsewhere in the region and indeed throughout Alberta by crop cultivation. Plant communities including prairie grasses and cacti support butterfly and bird species far to the north of their other occurrences in Alberta. The valley provides important habitat for resident moose, elk and deer and for diverse migratory bird species. It is one of the most diverse and productive river valleys in the Parkland and Boreal Forest of Canada. It is a nationally significant waterway that supplies water to the Peace-Athabasca Delta, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. The river contains high species diversity of fish, including recently documented prickly sculpin at the eastern edge of their current distribution, and threatened Alberta bull trout.

Hydroelectric dam proposals on the Peace River in the vicinity of the historic Fort Dunvegan re-appeared in summer 2014. AWA believes that there are plentiful opportunities for clean energy that do not jeopardize the most ecologically important areas of Alberta. Ecological impacts from BC Hydro's upstream dams are already far too high on the downstream Peace River. Citing unfavourable economic conditions, Transalta requested in May 2014 a five year extension on its approval to build its Glacier Power 100 MW weir project at Dunvegan that would create a 25 km headpond. AWA has submitted its concerns with the project proceeding. Meanwhile, AWA learned in July 2014 of the Amisk 300 MW project that is contemplated for 10 km upstream of Dunvegan, which would entail a 50 km headpond. AWA also registered concerns with British Columbia's Site C dam proposal on the Peace River for its downstream impacts on aquatic and river corridor habitat.

BISTCHO

The Dene Tha' of Chateh and Hay-Zama has expressed interest in seeing the Bistcho Area of Concern protected as a Wildland Park. No progress has been made on this area of concern in this fiscal year. AWA looks forward to opportunities to work for the protection of this area in northwestern Alberta as provincial planning processes for this region get underway in the near future.

CARIBOU MOUNTAINS

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

Due to the area's isolation, and lack of good biological information, the Caribou Mountains are vulnerable to exploitation. The area contains substantial geophysical exploration disturbance. Timber harvesting has occurred 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 about 75 percent since 1995, (July 2010 ASRD provincial status report) and increased motorized access would further stress this endangered species. If the insulating organic cover is disturbed by human activity, the permafrost beneath can melt, damaging vegetation, soils, and water flow regime.

In 2006 AWA participated in the local advisory committee in order to finalize the draft management plan for the park. In early 2007, AWA submitted extensive suggestions to the Alberta government, with a view to maintaining the area in its relatively undisturbed state. As of August 2014, despite assurances, the draft management plan had still not been produced.

The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2004/5 - 2013/14 provides the following qualitative assessment of current industrial/development infrastructure in the Caribou Mountains: “Substantial geophysical exploration lines. Little oil and gas development. Minimal roadway development. Timber harvesting along the southern edge of the caribou range. Severely impacted by fire over the last 20 years.”



Caribou in the Tonquin Valley, Jasper National Park, photographed by G. Gruenewald

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

WILLMORE WILDERNESS PARK

At more than 1 million acres, the Willmore Wilderness Park is magnificent in the scheme of Alberta's protected areas network. Designated a park in 1959 by the provincial government, Willmore has seen little tourism or recreational development, leaving the area pristine for backcountry enthusiasts to explore. Traditional activities such as trail riding, hunting, and trapping are allowed in the park, continuing the rich heritage of aboriginal peoples and early outfitters.

The Willmore is dear to the heart of AWA as a shining example of what wilderness can and should be, though 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 civil servants who seem even more frequently to have little value or understanding of true wilderness. The push for fixed roof structures and routes to make it easy for them to access this park are ongoing.

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

Proposals to add the Willmore Wilderness Park, and other areas adjacent in the Rocky Mountain Parks, to the Rocky Mountain World Heritage Site seem to have stalled completely, due largely to opposition from one local organization. AWA continues to be an enthusiastic supporter of designation and commemoration of the Willmore by the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

KAKWA

The Kakwa region is adjacent to the northernmost border of Jasper National Park, along the border of British Columbia. This area covers the most northerly portions of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta and includes South Kakwa and Caw Ridge. The area varies from mountainous terrain and alpine meadows in the south to rolling hills covered in forest in the north and east. AWA has called Caw Ridge "Alberta's Serengeti" due to the plentiful and diverse wildlife populations the ridge supports and nurtures.

AWA continues to oppose development on Caw Ridge and will continue to oppose applications for coal mining, and other industrial developments, in this sensitive wilderness.

The Government of Canada passed new greenhouse gas legislation in 2012 that limits the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by coal-fired generation facilities. As a result, Maxim Power Corporation applied to amend their original permit to expand the existing HR Milner Generating Station, a 150-megawatt coal-fired power plant located north of Grande Cache, Alberta. AWA opposed this original expansion and was pleased that Maxim's amendment proposal to convert the fuel source from coal to natural gas was approved by Alberta Utilities Commission on June 4, 2014.

AWA attended a two day reclamation foundation workshop hosted by Grande Cache Coal (GCC). AWA presented on reclamation priorities for No.12 B2 open pit mine and ways to avoid surface mining on Caw Ridge due to its environmental significance. GCC does not have any short term plans to mine Caw

Ridge; their current focus is on previously mined areas. Following the workshop, GCC underwent some major staff changes in the environment/reclamation department. AWA continues to monitor their reclamation progress and future mining plans.

BIGHORN WILDLAND

AWA has had a long-standing interest in the Bighorn Wildland ever since the organization's earliest days in the 1960s. At more than 4,000 km², the Bighorn is a large and intact wilderness that retains its ecological integrity largely due to the absence of roads and industrialized access, yet it remains primarily unprotected.

AWA is pushing for the protection of the Bighorn as a Wildland Provincial Park under the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP). We have advocated for this outcome at multiple NSRP stakeholder meetings, as well as in submissions to the Land Use Secretariat, as well as communications with the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC). At the time that the NSRP process was initiated, this designation would have implied a transition of the Bighorn management to be under the purview of the ministry of Tourism Parks and Recreation, however subsequent to ministerial reorganizations in September 2014, responsibility for parks reverted to ESRD. The goal of having the Bighorn designated a park nevertheless remains unchanged.

In the meantime, AWA continues to monitor the motorized trail network in the area of the Upper Ram/Clearwater Forest Land Use Zone, as we have done since access was given to motorized recreationists in 2002. One staff member and one volunteer backpacked into the Canary Creek area for two days in August 2014 to perform trail monitoring of part of the Hummingbird area trail network, as a follow-up to a similar trip to monitor the same trail made in 2012 and 2013. The 2013 trip originally scheduled for July had to be postponed due to the on-the-ground conditions in the area after the June floods. At that time, extensive damage to the trail system from the floods was discovered, which had been redressed via the construction of several kilometres of new trail bypassing the washed-out regions. Unfortunately, the new trails, acknowledged by ESRD as having been created through volunteer efforts, were constructed without concern for existing vegetation, waterways or biological systems, and without any preventative measures to avoid future significant erosion or other damage along the new trails. As anticipated, the beginnings of erosion on the new trail was seen during the 2014 trip, despite the relatively dry 2013-2014 season.

During a presentation to ESRD staff, AWA reiterated our 2012 argument that the damage was an indication that the topography, soil, and vegetation of the region are not suited to withstand motorized recreation. AWA has asked that these trails remain permanently closed to motorized vehicles; the damage is so severe it is doubtful they can be restored by either natural processes or volunteer trail stewardship groups. A followup discussion is scheduled for late October 2014, during which it is anticipated that the possibility of the Bighorn designation as a Wildland Park under the NSRP will also be addressed.

This year AWA conducted two additional trips to download TRAFx units buried at strategic points on the Upper Ram/Clearwater motorized access trail system. Concern over ongoing illegal use, and associated erosion and significant sedimentation and siltation from motorized crossings of streams, remains paramount in our push to have these trails closed. Our work in this area is dependent on volunteers and we will maintain our presence monitoring the motorized access and damaged sites. AWA routinely monitors minutes from the government's Bighorn Backcountry Monitoring Committee.

AWA meets regularly with ESRD staff in the Rocky Mountain House area, at which we present the findings of our trail monitoring work. There has been acknowledgement among the ESRD staff that many of the areas of the Bighorn are unsuited to support motorized recreational activity; however they maintain that trails and wet conditions will be accounted for on a year by year basis. AWA continues to advocate for permanent trail closures within the Prime Protection Zone of the Eastern Slopes.

Since 1994, AWA has worked to open and maintain the Historic Bighorn Trail between Crescent Falls on the Bighorn River and the Wapiabi, Blackstone and Chungo Gaps. The 2013 June floods have put this work in jeopardy, and there was no 2014 trip after AWA determined that without government support for additional materials and logistics, the ground cannot support traffic on the valley and trails of the Wapiabi River that are used to access the work area. Roughly 50% of this part of the historic trail has become very difficult and may not be worth maintaining. On the 2013 trip, the work party tried to proceed further up the Wapiabi Valley towards George Creek, but found sections of the trail so boggy as to be almost horse swallowing.

AWA has been in communication with staff from ESRD's Backcountry Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program seeking the aforementioned support; and we are hopeful support for this trail will be given priority.

CROWN OF THE CONTINENT ECOSYSTEM

AWA works towards protection and better management of wilderness throughout the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, particularly in those areas we have identified as Wild Spaces. From Waterton National Park to southern Kananaskis Country, AWA has been working on a number of collaborative initiatives and responding to local member interests and concerns.

The Crown of the Continent region is a crucial mountain ecosystem, covering 44,000 km² of land across Alberta, British Columbia and Montana. In Alberta, Crown of the Continent land stretches from southern Kananaskis Country south to Waterton National Park. It approximates to the Southern Eastern Slopes region, headwaters of the South Saskatchewan River system and the source of clean water across southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Five of AWA's Areas of Concern fall within the Crown of the Continent/ Southern Eastern Slopes Region: South Ghost, Kananaskis Country, Livingstone-Porcupine, Castle and Waterton Parkland.

SOUTH GHOST - GHOST-WAIPAROUS

Our main interest in this area is to ensure that wilderness, wildlife, and water quality and quantity are considered in all decisions that are made in the region that is adjacent to - and forms the transition zone for - the South Ghost area.

The Ghost Watershed Alliance Society has continued with an ecosystem-based planning and conservation project for the Ghost River Watershed. The project has involved the community in examining what sustainable forest management is, and how such a model could be applied in the Ghost Watershed. Further to this, GWAS is currently entering Phase II of a State of the Watershed Report that is hoped, by 2015, will lay the foundation for a Watershed Management Plan for the Ghost River's

watershed. A formal Steering Committee of stakeholders, government and local experts is currently being established that will provide input and feedback as the report is developed.

AWA continues to have a representative on the Ghost Stewardship and Monitoring Committee, a group of stakeholders whose purpose is to ensure reasonable area access to all users while protecting the character of the region.

KANANASKIS COUNTRY

Development continues to be an important focus in Kananaskis Country. AWA continues to work with Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition (BCEC) as part of Fish and Forest work, although developments in Kananaskis are quiet for now. A communiqué was developed from AWA's Fish, Forests, and Flood Resiliency Forum in June 2014 to guide future AWA work and provide principles for ongoing discussions with decision makers about Alberta's Eastern Slopes. The South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) established several expansions of existing provincial parks and recreation areas within Kananaskis including Elbow Valley Provincial Park's 333ha expansion and Sibbald Lake Provincial Recreation Area's 83ha expansion. A patchwork of conservation areas has been established by the SSRP, including a 453ha expansion of Blue Creek Wildland Provincial Park within the Kananaskis area. This is a small step towards increased connectivity for wildlife along the south Eastern Slopes but much more is needed. AWA continues to push for more connectivity and wildlife movement corridors between established protected areas.

AWA continues to believe that extensive improvements in operating standards for Spray Lake Sawmills are required before the company should maintain their Forest Stewardship Council certification, granted on a temporary basis in the fall of 2013. AWA will submit concerns regarding their forestry operations in the Ghost and Kananaskis at their upcoming October 2014 audit lead by Bureau Veritas Certification.

Kananaskis Country was extensively changed, and a great deal of existing human infrastructure was damaged, by the floods of June 2013. In outreach activities following the flood, AWA called for actions to restore and sustain watershed ecology and reduce existing linear disturbance in Kananaskis that reduces water absorption and increases sediment and contaminant transport. In July 2014, the Government of Alberta approved the rebuilding of Kananaskis Golf Course in Evan Thomas Creek floodway for \$18 million. Kananaskis Country remains an important focus of AWA's outreach and winter outdoor activities.

In post-2013 flood recovery, AWA continues to be a voice for actions that work with rather than against watershed ecology in the Kananaskis and elsewhere. We presented to a provincial water conference on our concerns for the illusory silver bullet of hugely costly and risky dam infrastructure in Kananaskis headwaters areas. We also requested the Alberta government refrain from rebuilding the Kananaskis Golf Course right across the floodway of the Evan Thomas Creek.

CASTLE WILDLAND

The Castle area, where AWA cut its teeth as a fledgling organization in the 1960s, will always be a major focus. AWA works in a coalition of groups calling for legislated protection in the Castle area, and has also helped the local community in its opposition to new plans for clearcut logging in the Castle region.

The proposal of a Castle Wildland Provincial Park in the draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, released in October 2013, consisted mainly of large areas of alpine rock and ice over 2,000 metres. Critical wildlife habitat and areas of high land use conflicts were excluded from the proposed park. A Castle public land use zone (PLUZ) was proposed in the forested valleys of the Castle allowing commercial forestry, grazing, and off-highway vehicle use. AWA strongly argued that this minimal level of protection in the Castle would be insufficient for headwater security, biodiversity goals, and species at risk recovery. AWA and other groups worked tirelessly to push the government to expand and strengthen the proposed protected areas in the Castle and elsewhere throughout the South Saskatchewan region. AWA strongly encouraged members and the general public to participate in the SSRP planning and consultation on the draft plan. The final version of the SSRP was released July 23, 2014. While some improvements were made from the draft, it fell short of long awaited expectations. A 54,588-ha Castle Wildland Provincial Park was created which included the area delineated as a PLUZ in the draft plan. Lines of communication remain open with the Government of Alberta, and AWA will continue to push for increased protection in the remainder Castle area not included in the Wildland Park.

The moratorium on logging in the Castle during the SSRP development ended as of September 1, 2014. Spray Lake Sawmills has not submitted any amendments to their 2014/15 Annual Operating Plan (AOP) so there is no indication that they are going to be harvesting in the Castle for this operating year. Their next AOP will be submitted in April of 2015 for the 2015/16 operating year.

As a follow-up to the *Sustainable Forests, Sustainable Communities* reports, AWA's communiqué from the Fish, Forests, and Flood Resiliency Forum offers guiding principles and an alternative and successful B.C. model to commercial forestry which can and should be adopted in certain Alberta headwater landscapes – ecosystem-based community forestry with careful ecosystem goal driven management.

Throughout early 2013, AWA became aware of a joint project between ESRD and departments at various educational facilities including the University of Alberta, to log part of Star Creek, immediately outside the Special Management Area but still within AWA's Castle Area of Concern. The project purports to study the effects of logging operations on water quantity and quality. However with Star Creek being some of the last remaining habitat for the threatened westslope cutthroat trout, AWA does not believe this is an appropriate time or location for such a project. AWA wrote to various proponents of the project to express our opposition in 2013 and again in 2014 when AWA became aware of a draft Forest Harvest Plan and a Government of Alberta Request for Proposal to harvest Star Creek.

AWA has continued its dialogue with Shell Canada to work towards improved management in the Castle Area, particularly reclamation of old wells and industrial roads.

A 5-year AESRD-sponsored DNA-based grizzly count in Castle/Waterton Parkland (WP) has been finding numbers significantly above those found by Stenhouse et al. The nature of this population, whether transient or permanent, remains unknown. Draft versions of the updated grizzly recovery strategy contain wording implying that populations in Castle/WP areas will only be "sustained" instead of being "recovered" - likely due to pressure from ranching communities in these areas. AWA has lodged strong objection to this intent.

LIVINGSTONE-PORCUPINE

In this Wild Space in the last two years AWA's major concern has been the logging of Hidden Creek in the upper Oldman watershed. In a very rapid in-and-out operation, Spray Lake Sawmills was granted a licence to conduct logging along this creek over a three-month period between November 2012 and

February 2013. Hidden Creek is by far the best habitat and spawning ground in the Oldman system for the threatened westslope cutthroat trout, and is also critical habitat for the threatened bull trout. As a consequence, the creek was slated to be re-designated as a Class 'A' with accompanying stringent restrictions on use and development. While the designation had not occurred at the time of the logging, ESRD did apparently instruct Spray Lake to treat it as Class 'A' in the meantime.

AWA has numerous concerns with the manner in which the logging was approved and conducted, including the lack of a proper assessment of the watershed following the *threatened* designation for westslope cutthroat trout, the lack of ongoing monitoring of siltation fencing and other infrastructure, the leaving behind of OHV access trails despite prior ESRD promises that they would be decommissioned, and most significantly, the construction of several kilometres of haul road well within the 100m buffer of the creek stipulated by the Class 'A' designation. AWA submitted an application under Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) legislation to gain information regarding how logging was approved without these conditions in place. In an extremely protracted process in which ESRD ignored a ruling by the Privacy Commissioner that the delays constituted a breach of regulation, AWA did not receive the requested documents until September 6, 2013. After extensive analysis of the FOIP documents, AWA found that the contents of the FOIP response shed a disturbing light on decision-making processes within AESRD. Concerns raised by the Fish and Wildlife (F&W) department within the ministry were seemingly ignored and overruled at the behest of other interests. Many recommendations made by F&W regarding haul roads, creek buffers, and reclamation revealed the existing Area Operating Plan (AOP) would further threaten native trout habitat. Despite these substantial concerns and recommendations, after a meeting on May 28, 2012 between F&W and Forestry, there was no further reference to any of the earlier F&W concerns, or their recommendations that Forestry had at one time supported. F&W then submitted an entirely different list of conditions they would want to see in place, under which they would agree to the logging. Without the meeting notes, AWA has inferred that the Forestry department made a decision to harvest Hidden Creek valuing only timber yield and F&W was unable to take an opposing stand any longer. The FOIP response showed poor management of an important watershed; a clear emphasis on timber quota from harvest was prioritized over an appropriate sustainable management approach championed by F&W. AWA believes the decision making process and actions taken by the Forestry Division of AESRD in this file fail what reasonable Albertans would expect this division to be capable of and responsible for. AWA met with the AESRD minister and submitted written documents outlining our serious disappointment and have made all documents related to this file accessible to the public on our website.

Another area within the C5 Forest Management Unit slated for logging was Trout Creek in the Porcupine Hills, also in this Area of Concern. AWA continues to work with Trout Unlimited and other parties to raise the profile of slated logging areas so the public is aware of the forest harvest practices occurring in areas of environmental significance.

Rampant off-highway vehicle (OHV) events are also a major issue in this area and have caused extensive damage in certain areas without proper government regulations and enforcement. AWA has expressed concern that better OHV management is needed and resources allocated to ensure events are restricted, overseen, and kept away from water courses or wetland areas of any kind.

Patchworks of poorly-connected alpine areas were proposed for protection as Wildland Provincial Parks in the Draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP). AWA was disappointed to see no significant improvements from the draft to the final SSRP in this Area of Concern. Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park was expanded by 26,261ha; Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park was expanded by 360ha; Livingstone Range was established as a new 564-ha Wildland Provincial Park; and High Rock was

established as a new 8,348-ha Wildland Provincial Park. Despite these new and expanded conservation areas, their size, shape, and high elevation offer scant habitat of significance for wildlife species and headwater security. Of note is that threatened westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout spawning streams lie almost entirely outside of the established parks.

A significant conservation success in the SSRP was the establishment of the 34,356-ha Pekisko Heritage Rangeland, immediately west of Highway 22 south of Turner Valley. This was achieved partly through the hard work of the Pekisko Group's Southern Foothills Community Stewardship Initiative, a community-focused process that AWA continues to support. The resulting report, *Values and Voices: Stewardship Priorities for the Southern Alberta Foothills*, made some strong recommendations on how to maintain the critical values of the region, in particular the need for effective management of the cumulative impacts of multiple activities on the landscape.

AWA is also represented on the Foothills Restoration Forum, which is looking at best practices for restoring fescue grasslands. AWA's particular focus is that avoidance of disturbance must take priority over any mitigation of damage.

AWA is a volunteer steward for the Beehive Natural Area in the headwaters of the Oldman River. The area is labeled as a Wildland Park on maps within the SSRP but there is no detail of where it will be designated to fall once the plan is operationalized. This area is a popular venue for our hikes program, as is the Whaleback area. We have not visited the Beehive for two seasons due to ongoing issues with road access to trail heads. This may be a good thing as the area will have more opportunity to restore and remain wild as the threat of motorized recreationists is ongoing in the Beehive.

WATERTON PARKLAND

The Waterton Parkland area consists mostly of private land to the east of Waterton Lakes National Park. Increasingly, landowners in this region are looking at ways to minimize the impacts of development on this landscape, as well as develop programs to minimize conflicts with wildlife. AWA gave advice and support to a coalition of landowners working in response to a proposed transmission line through the region. Rather than deal with the proposals as individuals, landowners have formed together as an association, to increase their voice in the process. AWA has also lent its support to individuals concerned about a large scale youth camp development proposed in the region.

Unfortunately, the application to rezone land adjacent to Police Outpost Provincial Park and the Outpost Wetlands Natural Area from Agriculture to Rural Recreation to build a Police Lake Ranch and Retreat was approved by Cardston County Council on September 8, 2014. The developer is now free to apply for a development permit to build whatever they want that fits under either the 'Permitted Uses' or 'Discretionary Uses' guidelines of the Rural Recreation land use description. AWA will continue to support the landowners group fighting against this development.

A local initiative, initially spearheaded by the Drywood Yarrow Conservation Partnership and now also taken up by the Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association in cooperation with local municipal governments, is looking at ways for local communities to live alongside carnivore populations; grizzly bear populations in particular may be expanding eastwards, and a range of attractant management programs are being developed to help reduce human-bear conflicts. Carcass disposal bins, reinforced grain stores and electric fencing to protect silage stores and beehives are all being used extensively. AWA supports these innovative programs which will hopefully work to the benefit of both bears and people.

PARKLAND REGION

RUMSEY

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

Progress is finally being made on the protection of Rumsey Natural Area from continuing industrial disturbance. As of February 29, 2012, addenda on all new petroleum and natural gas agreements within the Rumsey Natural Area now read "Surface Access is Not Permitted." Previously, leases were sold with "Surface Access Subject to Restrictions." AWA regards this as an encouraging first step in the long-term phase out of oil and gas activity in the Natural Area.

The long-awaited management plan for Rumsey has finally been begun by Alberta Parks, and AWA is providing assistance and advice as the planning process takes shape. We hoped to see a draft in 2014 but that seems unlikely now and it may be available to us for 2015.

WAINWRIGHT DUNES

AWA serves on the advisory group for the Wainwright Dunes and monitors implementation of the management plan approved in 1999 for this nationally significant parkland sand dune and wetland wilderness. Elk populations continue to grow in the protected area and surrounding lands and may outstrip the capacity of the area in the near future. We continue to monitor the situation; the advisory group has not met for a number of years.

GRASSLANDS REGION

MIDDLE SAND HILLS

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

A large portion of the Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern lies within the boundaries of the Canadian Forces Base (C.F.B.) Suffield military reserve. As such, the military is intricately tied to the history, and

fate, of this wildland. Since 1971, the Department of National Defence has recognized the fragility of the area and has zoned the eastern part of the base out-of-bounds for military training.

SUFFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA

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

We are working toward increased protection and more ecologically sensitive management of the larger Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern and hope to see a long-promised management planning process underway soon.

MILK RIVER-SAGE CREEK

The Milk River-Sage Creek Area of Concern 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 lake that is very productive for waterfowl and shorebirds in wetter years;
- The balance of the area, a diverse area encompassing 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 on the glaciated plains of North America. Its uplands, wetlands, and valleys constitute one of the largest undisturbed grasslands in Canada. The 5,000 km² Milk River-Sage Creek area is a natural diversity hotspot in the grasslands of southeastern Alberta.

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. Those factors are changing rapidly. There is a high degree of urgency to protect the area. The extreme southeastern corner of Alberta was once the forgotten corner but it is forgotten no more. Recent activity by oil and gas companies around the Cypress Hills gives every indication that it will turn parts of the study area into highly developed landscapes like the rest of Alberta.

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. As part of our annual hikes program a day hike into the Sage Creek area was conducted.

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, proposals have not been denied by the government. 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 a nesting area for birds 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). 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 South Saskatchewan Regional Plan identifies this area for future grassland conservation but does not prohibit new industrial development while planning is ongoing.

MILK RIVER RIDGE

This area is known for its sensitive Foothills Grasslands, productive wetlands and the only open plains habitat for Grizzly Bears in Alberta. Oil and gas development in the Alberta Bakken is surrounding the few remaining intact patches. The local leaseholders want protection under Heritage Rangeland designation and, with the encouragement of the AWA at public information sessions; Alberta has recognized this area in the recently released South Saskatchewan plan. AWA continues to work with

government and the Alberta Energy Regulator to restrict industrial development in this area and achieve formal protected area status.

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, in formal stewardship of the Milk River Natural Area. This rolling grassland in extreme southeastern Alberta contains a wide variety of habitats supporting hundreds of native species, some of which are endangered. AWA works alongside representatives from the local county, the ranching community, Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, and provincial government agencies.

The decision to form the society and take out a lease for the area came out of the management planning process in the 1980s. As part of its mandate, the society 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, at least in terms of biodiversity.

The Management Society has installed traffic counters to establish current levels of vehicle usage. An old wellsite road gives vehicles access to the edge of the Milk River Canyon, leaving 80 percent of the Natural Area upland free of vehicle traffic. However, EnCana Corporation has developed a number of wells right next door, with gravel track access almost to the corner of the Natural Area. The Natural Area is currently unregulated with respect to vehicle use. The society is concerned that this could open the area to increased and undesirable use. Formally monitoring vehicle use will provide baseline information so that concerns can be expressed promptly if increases are detected.

The society generally meets twice a year and will continue to manage this area with maintenance of ecological integrity as a 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 Milk River Management Society is an excellent example of collaborative management of a protected area.

PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM

The Prairie Conservation Forum is a large voluntary coalition of stakeholder groups whose members are interested in the conservation of native prairie and parkland environments in Alberta. The Forum, which has been in existence for more than two decades, is currently involved in the implementation of the Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan. AWA is a sponsor of the Forum and participates in quarterly meetings of the group that includes a diverse membership of those concerned with prairie conservation.

FOOTHILLS RESTORATION FORUM

AWA is on the Technical Advisory Committee for the Foothills Restoration Forum. The multi-stakeholder group is looking at best practices for restoring fescue grasslands. AWA strongly supports three main principles for minimizing disturbance in native prairie. First, avoidance of disturbance must take priority over any mitigation of damage. Second, if avoidance is not possible, disturbance should be minimized and third, incremental environmental effects must be avoided. The forum provides opportunity for informed debate and discussion. AWA continues to engage wind energy companies and distribute the document *Minimizing Disturbance of Alberta's Native Prairie by Wind Energy Development* developed as part of our work with the forum.

WATER

AWA's vision is that for the well-being of all living things, Alberta has healthy, natural ecosystems in its river headwaters; there is plentiful clean water for all Albertans; there is province-wide awareness and stewardship of water as a precious, life-giving resource; and there is effective, ecosystem-based management of Alberta's watersheds, groundwater, river valleys, lakes, and wetlands. From its earliest days, AWA has raised awareness of the important links between land use and water resources.

Mountains and foothills headwaters regions are crucial to watershed health, since most of our groundwater and river flows originate from these heights of land. AWA's *Fish and Forests* coordinating initiative from the North Saskatchewan to Oldman headwaters was active again this year (see more details in the Forests section). Headwaters management recommendations formed a prominent part of our input to the Alberta government for its South Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan regional plans. We also supported the communications strategy development of the Upper Bow Basin Cumulative Effects Study and the launch of its outreach to municipalities in the Calgary Regional Partnership area.

Our other southern Alberta watershed activities emphasized post-2013 flood recovery policy. In publications, interviews, a provincial water professionals' conference presentation, and meetings with government officials, AWA emphasized that working with watershed ecology is necessary to build long-term cost effective flood resilience, especially considering anticipated climate change-affected flows. We emphasized moving back vulnerable infrastructure in low density areas to create room for flood waters to dissipate, and the importance of ensuring and restoring absorptive capacity in headwaters, wetlands, river-connected aquifers, and river bank vegetation.

AWA continues to exchange information and coordinate much of its water work with colleagues in the Alberta Environment Network's Water Caucus. Our Alberta Water Council, regional watershed council and wetland policy work is outlined in the Government Policy section. In other water-related policy work, we engaged with Alberta Utilities Commission's hydroelectric (and wind power) application review in late 2013. We also supported ENGO delegates in Alberta's 2014 regulatory review of fracking and in situ projects water use.

FORESTS

AWA's untiring efforts to see reassessment of how forests are managed in Alberta, particularly in the Eastern Slopes, source of clean water for much of the province, have been tireless and remain unanswered. None-the-less, the principle seems to be gaining traction, even in government circles. Discussions around the province's developing Land-Use Framework are focusing more on watershed protection, particularly in the South Saskatchewan region. March 2011 recommendations from the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Committee included "Manage land in the headwaters (e.g., Eastern Slopes and Cypress Hills areas) so that maintaining watershed integrity is given highest priority by considering impacts of land disturbance in management decisions." In the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan it states "Watershed management and headwaters protection is the priority. Forests will be managed with this as the highest priority (including water storage, recharge and release functions)."

Numerous local groups are working to oppose plans for clearcut logging in their communities. Groups in the Ghost, Bragg Creek, Crowsnest, Beaver Mines and the Castle have all been active. AWA believes that there is a unifying theme to many of these disputes: a failure to manage forests for their many non-forestry values, and a lack of meaningful public involvement in management decisions. AWA has been working to bring together some of these different initiatives to discuss common ground.

In 2011 and 2012, AWA worked with a number of groups, including the Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition to produce a *Sustainable Forests, Sustainable Communities* report with follow-up addendums. The high-level recommendations in the original report along with the addendums highlighting specific actions and constraints should be incorporated into any forestry planning to ensure better ecosystem based outcomes. The report helps present an alternative model of forest management in Alberta, one representing all of the values of forests and not just their timber value.

Emerging from this and other meetings with the various local groups, scientists, ENGOs and other members of the public concerned about forests in southern Alberta, AWA has formed the *Fish and Forests Initiative* as a loose coalition of those parties. Its scope of concern comprises the forests in Alberta's foothills, from the US border up to the Bighorn area, and the watersheds in those forests, especially as concerns the various aquatic species living in those headwaters. The initiative is an effort to coordinate the work being done by the various parties aimed at protecting their forest ecosystems, to share information and insight, and to foster communication between the parties where it can help achieve our mutual objectives. There have been regular Fish and Forests meetings throughout 2013, as well as active communication over an electronic discussion group set up to support the initiative. In September 2014, AWA created an online Fish and Forests webpage as an information-gathering tool to post and share photos, reports, letters, and other results obtained from regular monitoring and issues arising in local forests.

To build on the *Sustainable Forests, Sustainable Communities* report and the collaboration of the Fish and Forests group, AWA hosted a Fish, Forests and Flood Resiliency Forum on June 26, 2014. The forum brought together conservation community colleagues and experts from several disciplines including biology, forestry, ecology, law, land use planning, economics, and strategic modeling to increase the profile of Eastern Slope's challenges and opportunities. The goal of the forum was to discuss past Eastern Slopes land use decisions; the present state of Alberta's forested headwaters; and future opportunities to improve land use management. The forum was well attended, the presenters were excellent, and there was good discussion throughout the day and evening, with media coverage. Issues were raised about deforestation due to industrial activity and the poor state of our native fish populations as a signal of declining watershed quality. Community forestry was introduced as an alternative model of forestry with lower environmental impact and potential to have a pilot ecosystem-based community forest in the Crowsnest area. A communiqué was developed based on principles from the forum to use in future AWA work and discussions with decision makers.

AWA was closely involved with the re-application by Spray Lake Sawmills (SLS) to achieve Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for sustainable forestry practices in their Forest Management Agreement area in Kananaskis and the Ghost. Their original application was turned down, but SLS did attain FSC certification in fall of 2013 based on the condition that SLS has one year to resolve over fifty outstanding issues or the certification will be revoked. AWA will submit concerns regarding their forestry operations in the Ghost and Kananaskis at their upcoming October 2014 audit lead by Bureau Veritas Certification. Fish and Forests partners will continue to monitor SLS's operations closely and consider

launching an appeal of the FSC decision to grant certification if their standard of operations do not improve significantly.

AWA engaged with Sundre Forest Products Inc. (SFP) to strengthen the ecosystem forest management outcomes in their FMA area east of the Bighorn. The FMA area includes Red Deer River and North Saskatchewan River basin headwaters and contains threatened bull trout and grizzly populations. Our comments on deficiencies in the indicators and targets chosen for their draft *Values, Objectives, Indicators and Targets* (VOIT) were reviewed by the company and its public advisory group at a closed February meeting. A follow up meeting with SFP was held in June 2014, and we will continue this engagement as their detailed forest management planning cycle proceeds. AWA has also circulated our VOIT feedback to forestry officials within ESRD, and has made presentations to the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance regarding this process.

GRIZZLY BEARS

Since the designation of the grizzly bear as a provincially *threatened* species in June 2010, AWA has worked to ensure that the new 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 grizzly Recovery Plan was clear that "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." But progress on reducing this access has been slow. AWA has worked with other environmental organizations to keep awareness of grizzlies high, through a series of timely news releases on issues such as grizzly mortality and high levels of motorized access in grizzly habitat.

The 2008 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 has instead opted to completely rewrite the Recovery Plan, from the ground up. Among other things, this rewrite is anticipated to bring the plan more in line, structurally, with recovery and management plans for other species at risk in Alberta. Progress has been extremely slow in this process, with a government workshop (attended by AWA and other conservation organizations) in March, and written feedback opportunities. Slowness aside, the process has been relatively productive, with ESRD exhibiting a general willingness to entertain and respond to most feedback and requested changes. However there is currently no known time-frame for how long the process is expected to take (in the meantime, the 2008-2013 Recovery Plan is understood to remain in effect).

The significant changes also make it difficult in some cases to tell what has changed from previous iterations of the plan. One expected, and disappointing, change, is that linear access recommendations – while enjoying a significantly expanded role in the new plan, and while having thresholds increased from 1.2km/km² to 0.85km/km² in secondary areas – will now only apply to roads instead of all open routes. AWA has protested this change.

Incorporation of access management provisions in the Land Use Framework regional plans (specifically, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP)) has also been slow, with no finalized access management framework in the SSRP anticipated before 2017.

ESRD continues to have no plans to re-introduce the grizzly bear hunt, although a worrying provision in early drafts of the new plan is for the management intent to only be to maintain existing populations (as opposed to recovering them) in parts of the province where human-grizzly interactions have been

particularly contentious. There is a concern that this may manifest itself as lower required population thresholds used as a prerequisite to re-introduce a hunt in those areas.

Grizzly mortality has been significantly heightened in 2013, and it is anticipated that when 2014 figures are released, they will show high mortality levels this year as well. No specific cause can be pinpointed; mortality numbers appear to be raised in all causal categories.

Numerous grizzly bear and bear safety presentations have been given in schools, universities and libraries over the last several years.

AWA's Save the Grizzly campaign – www.savethegrizzly.ca – continues as an important focus of AWA's grizzly work, along with our satirical www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com campaign.

CARIBOU

Self-sustaining woodland caribou populations indicate intact old growth forest and peat wetlands at a large landscape scale of thousands of square kilometres, which benefits many other species. Of the fifteen caribou populations on Alberta provincial lands, all but one (the Yates on the NWT border) are already in serious decline and expected to die out in the next several decades under current weak management policies. Forestry and energy industry footprint plus recreation access, rather than natural fire disturbance, limit most Alberta caribou populations. Industrial footprint generates deer and moose habitat, stimulating predator populations and access to caribou, and robs them of the ability to minimize overlap with predators.

This year, AWA was one of two Alberta Environmental Network delegates to the provincial government's Multi-sector Advisory Group (MSAG) for Caribou range planning. The geographic focus was the Little Smoky-A La Peche caribou ranges in west central Alberta. Since 2005, Alberta has killed 1,000 wolves through aerial shooting and some poisoning to sustain these populations, rather than address forestry and energy footprint that is the root cause of high predation. Under the 2012 federal recovery strategy for boreal woodland caribou, provinces are required to write range plans outlining how ranges will be managed to attain a minimum of 65% undisturbed habitat over time.

Within MSAG, AWA requested immediate, sustained progress in reducing forestry and energy disturbance, which these endangered populations require to be self-sustaining. We also advanced pragmatic solutions to minimize socio-economic impacts. For example, a regional agreement to share wood fibre quotas across west-central Alberta would enable in-range quota holders to absorb a fair but not crippling share of cut reduction to stop logging in caribou range and buffer areas. As well, energy companies could extract significant resources while aggregating and reducing their surface footprint if Alberta placed total surface disturbance limits within caribou ranges and gave companies alternatives to prove tenure, to motivate longer-distance directional drilling and pooling of leases.

Alberta has four populations of southern mountain caribou, all in west central Alberta. As the federal southern mountain caribou recovery strategy neared completion, AWA issued an Action Alert and submitted its own comments for the draft strategy. Since May 2014, when federal scientific advisors assessed southern mountain caribou as endangered, AWA media outreach has raised awareness of the ongoing extensive new energy lease sales by the Alberta government in two of those ranges without any meaningful footprint limits.

AWA also supported Keepers of the Athabasca in triggering audits of Forest Stewardship Council certification practices related to caribou habitat management concerns in Alberta certified forests. The results of these audits have not yet been made public.

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

We have made progress on the sage-grouse files and while the anger and frustration some ranchers experienced because of the Emergency Protection Order is still a reality, we are moving forward with our goal of demonstrating that conservation of species at risk can be a financially and culturally rewarding experience. It has been tumultuous and difficult but we are resolved to work our way through to this goal.

We had one of our regular evening talks with a rancher and former Board of Directors of AWA member from the Medicine Hat area, Hyland Armstrong came to Calgary to talk about maintaining biodiversity on the landscape and essentially looking at "Cows as Stewards". The role ranchers play in working with their herds and the wildlife that is present on the land, is critical to successfully maintaining the biodiversity of our grasslands. His presentation was very well received and the discussion excellent. A wide diversity of individuals was present, some ranchers came specifically to hear and others attending included a professor from U of C, the MLA for Little Bow Constituency and other interested and concerned members. There was an overwhelming sense of the importance of working to keep endangered species on the landscape; but it takes work, time and effort on the part of the rancher. Being an absent herd owner won't work; cows need tending and moving to the right areas of a lease, they need troughs for water and they need to be kept away from sensitive areas, whether riparian or other. Ranchers need to have "Ranch Plans".

Ranch Planning is where we are at with the ranch family we are working with. We have met with Environment Canada, Western Region to talk about sage-grouse especially in relation to Grasslands National Park but also in relation to the Sage-grouse Partnership (SGP) and our work. We obtained their skeleton plan and will work with it and one we obtained from American colleagues to develop an outline of what we need and want in a successful ranch plan when SG are at risk.

Cliff Wallis led a tour of southern Saskatchewan and southern Alberta with representatives from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), Nature Canada and Nature Conservancy of Canada. This involved several meetings with ranchers, including a gathering of government, ranchers and NGOs in Shaunavon. The atmosphere in Saskatchewan seems more open and while there are concerns with the Emergency Order, key ranchers and NGOs are working their way through issues in a collaborative manner.

Cliff Wallis and two of the ranchers also attended Sage-grouse Initiative week-long meetings in Twin Falls Idaho. The ranchers were able to meet other ranchers that were making progress and learn about the success they are having in some areas of the U.S. We were able to cover all the expenses and provide a modest honorarium to the ranchers to help them be away from their ranch for that period of time.

We have written what we hope will be a successful grant application to the U.S. based NFWF and with those funds will be able to support the ranchers to document an oral history of how they have managed the ranch on the sage brush flats so that they have successful cattle herds and active sage-grouse leks after 100 years of ranching. We will also use funds to help prepare the ranch plan. That work will continue in the New Year and through the winter months.

Our strategy is based in excellent communications and finding the best way to communicate so that it is a two way path with all those involved listening and contributing. We believe field days and opportunities to learn from each other will be key to success with the ranchers. One thing we have heard loud and clear from the folks who attended the talk we presented was their perception that if we and ranchers don't do something to change the trend of decline, it is time for the government to make it happen. Losing sage-grouse is not an option. Realizing the sentiment came from a mixed group, taking time to learn and be informed, is encouraging.

Over the past couple of decades, we have had great successes working with ranchers in southwestern Alberta and other areas in southeastern Alberta but this issue has proven more challenging within the Sage Grouse area. With the information gathered and field work in Saskatchewan, Alberta and the USA, we continue to share and communicate that information so that we can all improve what we are doing out there. By focusing in on one area in SE Alberta as a pilot, we believe we can overcome some of the negativity towards environmental protection (and NGOs) in southeastern Alberta and accomplish real results on the ground. It is a work in progress but we remain committed to it.

There is no doubt this work is difficult, takes many hours, a great deal of travel and it takes a toll personally; we are none-the-less determined to make the difference and we hope we can get some on the ground actions in place; show others what will make a difference and do it in time for the few remaining sage-grouse and before government has to take next steps.

The work done on this issue to date has been supported by core funds, Canadian Energy Pipeline Association (CEPA) and Enbridge Inc.

BLACK BEARS

Though black bears are abundant in Alberta, AWA remains concerned that they are poorly managed in some regions, with minimal effort to prevent bear access to municipal dumps or correct poor conduct from some industrial camps. "BearSmart" guidelines are beneficial, but greater provincial government commitment, leadership and transparency are still needed. After a few years of apparent low mortality, rates of bear-human conflicts seem to have significantly increased over 2013-2014; however, black bear mortality levels are not made readily available.

WOLVES

Wolves and other native predators play an important role in keeping wild ecosystems healthy. Our goal is for the provincial government to take responsibility for managing Alberta's wolves in a science-based and transparent manner. AWA's wolf work this year again covered three main areas: caribou-wolf management issues (outlined in the Caribou section above); raising awareness of the drawbacks of wolf bounty programs funded by some municipalities and private groups; and advancing non-lethal methods for reducing risk to livestock from wolves and other predators.

In February 2014, scientists from the Canid Specialist Group of the distinguished International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) sent a letter to the Alberta Premier requesting the government replace its archaic, ineffective wolf bounties with scientific wolf management. We value these scientists' expertise, and our outreach helped raised awareness of their concerns. Despite severe limitations to publicly available data, we tracked and reported the extent of municipal wolf bounty claims, as the Alberta government refuses to do so. To advance collaborative non-lethal wolf management solutions,

we established links to several cattle and sheep producers who actively minimize attractants to successfully co-exist with wolves. We plan to further these links in the coming year.

GAME FARMING

While AWA supports living wildlife as part of our economy, we restrict this support to economies based on maintaining wildlife populations in their natural habitats. AWA has opposed the domestication, privatization and commercialization of wildlife including on game farms since 1980 when Alberta's Wildlife Policy was rewritten to allow game farming. In 2011 AWA vehemently opposed proposed amendments to the Livestock Industry Diversification Act (Bill 11) that would have reclassified domestic deer and elk as "diversified livestock." AWA is of the opinion that wild game must not be treated as livestock either in practice or within legislation. In 2014, the paid killing of game farmed animals remains illegal, although it is allowed next door in Saskatchewan. Farming wildlife is a tenuous business and the number of game farms registered in Alberta dropped from around 400 in 2000 to 300 today.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD), the pervasive, unstoppable prion disease, had spread from game farms to the wild by 1996 where it continues apace, with over 200 positive tests of deer and elk heads submitted voluntarily by hunters and compulsorily from game farms, since 2005. The area of infection again increased in Alberta in the past year, now reaching the Milk River, areas south of Cypress Hills and up the Red Deer River as far as the town of Dorothy. The Canadian Food and Inspection Agency is now admitting that CWD is so entrenched in Saskatchewan and Alberta as to be beyond eradication. Focus is now shifting to attempts to control the spread. Saskatchewan has now suspended its volunteer program of CWD surveillance due to hunter fatigue with the program. The future of hunting members of the deer family is being challenged as CWD spreads to more species and areas.

AWA monitors CWD both in terms of its spread and the scientific literature. A 2012 PLOS paper reporting results of a significant study by American and Canadian scientists, funded in part by the CFIA, of the transmission of CWD to reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*), which is the same species as caribou, indicates that while CWD has not yet been found naturally in reindeer (caribou), it was able to be transmitted from white-tailed deer to reindeer in experimental conditions. The implications of this are not only chilling for Native Peoples who rely on caribou for food, but for Alberta's already beleaguered woodland caribou.

AWA continues to call for both federal and provincial leadership in confronting CWD and in eliminating the game farming industry in the province where its costs far exceed its benefits.

FERAL HORSES

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

AWA expressed concern to the consultants preparing the management plan about the general lack of wildlife research on Eastern Slopes lands over the past 30 or more years; the last *General Status of Alberta Wild Species report* was 2005. It is disconcerting that limited resources are being used towards creating policy for an introduced species such as the feral horse when many native species are declining and not receiving adequate research or attention. Provincial feral horse policy should be developed in the context of protecting native species and natural ecosystem processes and in conjunction with an updated policy for native wildlife.

Following input into the consultant report, AWA was asked to be a part of a committee to develop strategy for Feral Horses. Even though we emphatically expressed our concern for native wildlife, we have decided to participate in the on-going process in order to defend the needs of native wildlife and to promote a scientific approach to policy development.

Alberta's Feral Horse Strategy committee met five times between late 2013 and mid 2014, with the last meeting (a field trip) in June. Since then, there have been no further meetings called. In this period of a year, Alberta has changed ESRD Ministers three times. The Strategy was to have been completed in a year, but this now appears to be impossible.



Great horned owl photographed by Christyann Olson

GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

PUBLIC LANDS

Alberta needs a publicly developed public lands policy to deal with all aspects of public land, including access, sales, management, and conservation. No such policy exists. 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.

TAX-RECOVERY LANDS

Despite the enormous public opposition to the behind-closed-doors sale of public lands the Alberta government continues to dispose of public land with no opportunity for any form of public input. In June 2011, AWA, Alberta Native Plant Council and Nature Alberta collaborated to publish a document, *Sale of Public Land in Alberta: Recommendations for Improving Regulation, Policy and Procedures*. Recommendations in the report include:

- The long-term interest of all Albertans is best served by retaining public lands as a trust held by government for conservation purposes.
- Protective notations should be applied to public lands in large blocks of prairie, Environmentally Significant Areas, and other important habitat areas for at risk species.
- Regulations are needed that clearly lay out procedures to be used for public land sale or trade and that require public notice and consultation.

The document has been distributed and provided to the government, but no response has been received from the government.

PROTECTED AREAS - PROVINCIAL

The Land Use Framework, discussed later in this report is the formal mechanism for achieving protected areas. The process is slow and management plans to operationalize the plans are even slower. Alberta has a long way to go to meet international protected area targets and AWA will continue to provide reasonable suggestions for protection, deferred activities and alternative mechanisms for achieving conservation and protection.

PROTECTED AREAS - FEDERAL

Increasingly, the management focus for the federal national parks is shifting away from the legislated priority of ecological integrity towards a simplistic push to get more visitor numbers through the park gates (making more visitor revenue in the process). While AWA believes that visitors are a crucial part of national parks, the push to open up the parks to more and more inappropriate activities to boost visitor numbers is putting at risk the environmental values which make the parks so important.

Despite enormous public opposition, the proposed "Glacier Discovery Walk" approved by Parks Canada in February 2012 was built and opened in the summer of 2014. Parks Canada has since continued in this direction entertaining proposals to expand ski operations at Marmot Basin, and to establish a lodge at Maligne Lake, in the middle of important habitat for caribou and other threatened species. This latter is in defiance of the management plan for the area, which in its draft versions had included a prohibition on overnight accommodation. The broken promise of no summer use at Mt. Norquay is yet another example of the commercialization of our National Parks. The almost certain negative impacts on wildlife including Alberta's threatened grizzly bears and important wildlife corridors, are vital concerns .

Travel restrictions on Banff National Park's Bow Valley Parkway, began in 2014. In the meantime there has been a rapid expansion of commercial intensive-use activities on this stretch of road. Examples include the Banff Marathon, the *Gran Fondo* bicycle race, both being given the blessing of Parks management, with extremely limited opportunities for public consultation or feedback. This approach belies the stated intent for the closures, that being to put the interests of wildlife first on this section of highway. AWA continues to advocate for a limit to true wilderness-friendly events in the park and strenuously opposes events such as those above.

LAND-USE FRAMEWORK (LUF)

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

LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN (LARP)

As the first regional plan approved under the Land-Use Framework's enabling legislation, the Lower Athabasca sets an important precedent for cumulative effects management. This year, AWA again emphasized in its outreach the importance of completing key unfinished pieces of LARP promised by the Alberta government. These include: an updated surface water withdrawal management framework for the Lower Athabasca River to increase protection from tar sands mine withdrawals during the most sensitive low winter flows; implementation of groundwater quantity and quality triggers and limits; a designated recreation trails system; and development of a biodiversity framework and land disturbance limits (see Biodiversity Strategy later in this section). We also encouraged the official establishment of Lower Athabasca Wildland Parks that are approved in policy, and have protective notations in place, yet are not officially established.

SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (SSRP)

Subsequent to a Regional Advisory Council (RAC) producing its recommendations to the Alberta Government in March 2011 and the completion of a lengthy public consultation process, the long-awaited draft SSRP was released October 10, 2013. AWA had representatives at fourteen of the twenty-one stakeholder consultation sessions that followed the release and provided input into the proposed air and water frameworks embedded within the draft SSRP. After extensive analysis of the document, government consultation sessions, and discussions with members, scientists, other environmental groups, and land use experts, AWA submitted feedback and recommendations on the draft plan to the Land-Use Secretariat.

Some of AWA main concerns included:

- The failure to address cumulative effects management, and to prioritize different activities in different areas.
- The positive strategic directions of the draft plan such as “advancing watershed management” and “advancing conservation and integrated management of Crown land” were not reflected adequately in the implementation and regulatory sections of the plan. As a consequence, the conservation related outcomes and the underlying objectives would not be achieved.
- The proposed Wildland Provincial Parks lacked connectivity for large carnivores and herbivores to thrive and very few of the tributaries that are known critical habitat for west slope cutthroat trout were within the boundaries of the proposed parks. Designated protected areas in the final plan need to encompass vital critical wildlife habitat zones including in grassland areas.
- Headwater security needed to become the top priority for land management of the Eastern Slopes and protecting remaining intact grasslands for species at risk recovery and restoring biodiversity needed to be taken more seriously in the White Area of the region.

AWA was also copied on over fifty letters written by members and citizens of southern Alberta providing their comments on the draft plan. Following the completion of the consultation period of the draft SSRP, the final version was released on July 23, 2014. In some regards it was an improvement from the draft plan but AWA sees it as a missed opportunity. The SSRP has created three new Wildland Provincial Parks including 54,588ha in the Castle, 4,498ha along the Livingstone Range, and High Rock’s 8,348ha running along the British Columbia border. Bluerock, Bob Creek, Bow Valley, and Don Getty Wildland Provincial Parks have all been expanded in the south Saskatchewan region along with the establishment of several new and expanded provincial recreation areas. Pekisko was designated a Heritage Rangeland; this adds 34,356ha of grazing leased public lands. Perhaps this designation will provide momentum for more Heritage Rangeland designations further east of the province and encourage other ranchers to embrace this option. The Milk River and Wild Horse Plains areas appear on a map for priority sub-regional planning which is hopeful but, meanwhile, no new designated conservation areas were established in either of those areas. The minimal conservation areas designated as parks omit critical valleys supporting unusual plant and animal diversity, and do not provide the connectivity and landscape-level protection that many species need to survive. Many key conservation pieces of the SSRP will not be completed until the end of 2015 or later, including the Regional Trails System Plan, Linear Footprint Management Plan, Biodiversity Management Framework, and Recreation Access Management Plans. The south Saskatchewan region desperately needs limits on human access and industrial development now. The SSRP officially came into effect September 1, 2014. Discussions with Land-Use Secretariat are ongoing and AWA continues to push for the strengthening conservation related outcomes in this region.

AWA remains highly supportive of the ideals behind the Land-Use Framework process. However we continue to have grave concerns about the feedback from the consultation processes seeming to bear little weight on the final outcomes and the lack of improvements the Government of Alberta has shown in protecting environmental significant areas and resolving land use conflicts in the two completed land use plans.

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN (NSRP)

2014 introduced the start of the third regional plan under the government's Land-Use Framework: the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP). Unlike the two regional plans to have previously been developed (the LARP and SSRP), the NSRP has seen an escalated development process. A terms-of-reference document and public workbook were unveiled in mid May, with Phase I public and stakeholder consultation sessions held from late May throughout June. Following the July 28 deadline for public feedback, a Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) was convened and has been meeting with that process expected to continue through late October.

AWA has been actively involved, with AWA staff, board members and/or volunteers attending more than half the 21 consultation sessions. AWA has met with and also been in conversation with ADM Parks and Protected areas, Senior Parks Planner and members of the NSRAC, and has made official submissions to the land use secretariat, that highlights conservation priorities for the region and makes a strong case for the Bighorn to be designated a Wildland Provincial Park. In addition to being included in AWA's official submission, this document has been circulated to NSRAC members, as well as the conservation community at large.

Among other priorities, key messages in the NSRP submission include:

- *Conservation Priorities*: The need to protect wild spaces, including AWA identified areas of concern such as the Bighorn, Parkland Dunes, Bodo Hills, and the North Saskatchewan River valley;
- *Protected Areas and Headwater Security*: The need to maintain or improve designation of existing protected areas within the NSR, especially with an eye to maintaining the security of our headwaters;
- *Linear Footprint Density*: The need to incorporate existing science into specific thresholds and recommendations for linear access;
- *Sustainable Forestry*: The need to dedicate North Saskatchewan headwaters forests for the security of our water;
- *Coal*: The need to maintain or enhance the intent and environmental focus of the 1976 Alberta Coal Policy;
- *Biodiversity*: The need to recover species at risk and ensure healthy forests and watersheds, and an increase in biodiversity;
- *Species at Risk*: The need to ensure the survival of species at risk living in the NSR, including grizzly bears, bull trout and harlequin ducks;
- *Motorized Off Road Recreation*: The need to develop a trail network that is properly designed and sustainable, including the closure and removal of trails in sensitive backcountry areas.

AWA's NSRP submission is also made available on AWA's purpose-built website for the North Saskatchewan and NSRP related concerns, found at <http://abwild.ca/water>.

This website is a key component of AWA's *Freshwater Campaign*, a campaign built around engaging recreationalists and current users of the North Saskatchewan headwaters areas. The campaign and the website provide tools for members of this constituency to become involved in the NSRP, and provide avenues for them to speak out in their own voice about why protection of the Bighorn and other areas in the North Saskatchewan is important to them. In addition to AWA's NSRP submission, the website acts as a resource repository with data, reports, maps and other documents related to the North

Saskatchewan, along with letter writing tools and other pages. A primary component is an online map of the region that invites users to post their own stories and photos of the headwaters, which get placed on the map for other users to view.

The Freshwater Campaign is being undertaken with the support of Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) as a component of their national “Homewaters” campaign. MEC members and customers who are interested in the protection of freshwater sources in the Rocky Mountain eastern slopes are encouraged to get in touch with AWA and to sign up with our Freshwater Campaign.

WETLAND POLICY

Wetlands provide crucial wildlife habitat, recharge groundwater, purify water, reduce flooding and drought risks, and act as carbon stores. Over two-thirds of wetlands in Alberta’s settled areas have been lost. On public lands, the connectivity of Alberta’s extensive peat wetlands is reduced by numerous seismic lines, pipelines, roads, and uncontrolled motorized access. There are no effective methods to replace the peat wetlands comprising over half the landscape that are destroyed by oil sands mines, whose leases extend over a hundred kilometres along both banks of the lower Athabasca River. Across the broad oil sands regional study area used to analyze cumulative development impacts for Shell’s Jackpine tar sands mine expansion, the federal-provincial Joint Review Panel found in July 2013 that there are unmitigated significant adverse impacts to wetlands and wetland-reliant species at risk.

AWA has championed a clear “no net loss” provincial wetland policy that a strong majority of Albertans supported in extensive public consultations of 2007. Instead, Alberta’s announced wetland policy of September 2013 fulfills tar sands industry non-consensus requests made to government after the multi-sector Alberta Water Council Wetland Policy Team completed its work. The policy has no clear provincial or regional goals, does not protect any outstanding wetlands outside protected areas from destruction, and downgrades wetland values where they are abundant. As requested by industry, it will exempt all approved and in-application oil sands projects from off-site restoration, instead promoting their on-site replacement with ‘equivalent’ uplands.

AWA will continue to advocate for a provincial wetland policy to be implemented that values the critical importance of both boreal and prairie wetlands on the landscape. Through engagement with watershed and regional planning, we will pursue opportunities to protect them from further loss at regional and provincial scales.

WATER FOR LIFE

Alberta’s ‘Water for Life’ strategy developed in 2003 has led to many positive watershed-based efforts to improve awareness and action on issues affecting water quality and supply. At a provincial level, the multi-sector Alberta Water Council advises the provincial government on implementing the three goals of Water for Life: safe, secure drinking water supply; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. Since November 2007, AWA has been an Environmental Sector Board member of the Council. AWA works to advance in particular the “healthy aquatic ecosystems” goal, which has made less progress than other Water for Life goals. In the past year we supported the ENGO delegate on the Riparian policy team; new Water Literacy and Lake Management

teams will become fully active in the coming year. We also supported enhanced tracking of the implementation of Council recommendations.

AWA is a member of most regional Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs). This year we attended the WPAC summit in autumn 2013 in the Beaver River watershed. Throughout the year we supported diverse WPAC efforts including the Oldman Watershed Council's Headwaters Action Plan, the Athabasca Watershed Council's identification of ongoing ecological issues, and we presented at the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance's NGO Forum. We also support grassroots Watershed Stewardship Groups; for example, we documented gravel mining concerns in a North Saskatchewan River basin sub-watershed, and we presented on AWA's Bighorn Trail stewardship in Rocky Mountain House at Clear Water Landcare's 'Celebrating our Successes' fall 2013 workshop.

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Alberta's overdue biodiversity and land disturbance regulatory frameworks are urgently required to deliver manage cumulative development impacts to land and water. Until they are in place with meaningful science-based limits, key goals of the now-approved Lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan regional plans will be unfulfilled. This year, AWA continued to emphasize the importance of completing a strong biodiversity strategy through its publications and in meetings with government officials. We were very encouraged that a stakeholder information workshop was held in February and that follow-up was promised for autumn 2014.

Since autumn 2013, AWA has been an ENGO delegate to the biodiversity advisory committee of the federal-provincial joint oil sands monitoring program. While we are very supportive of the enhanced rigour and cause-effects monitoring basis of the program, we have voiced concerns about lack of aboriginal participation and insufficient funding for core elements such as biodiversity site monitoring frequency, fish population and wetland monitoring.

SPECIES AT RISK

Protecting remaining large wildland habitats so that biodiversity, including species at risk, and non-industrial landscapes may survive is core to AWA's day-to-day work. Species at risk are the canary in the coal mine with regard to our relationship with the earth. Be they butterflies, snails or the more visible grizzly bear or woodland caribou, their loss is a direct example of society's failure to manage the environment in a sustainable, renewable way.

Legally, species at risk do not receive adequate protection in most cases throughout Alberta. It is concerning that the direction of recent federal decisions is towards only protecting species on federal lands that are not at the so-called 'periphery' of their range, while provincial legislation only sets up optional recovery plans without legal obligations to protect habitat.

FEDERAL SPECIES AT RISK ACT (SARA)

Effective application of the 2002 federal *Species at Risk Act* to bring about more habitat protection is needed. 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.

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

Greater sage-grouse numbers continued their decline and the species continues to hold on by a thread in south eastern Alberta while neither the provincial nor federal government has taken any meaningful management action despite the fact that an emergency protection order has been given. Poor communication at both levels of government, and poor understanding of the order by ranchers and industry have led to tumultuous relationships. Throughout this year AWA has been working with individual ranchers who have sage-grouse on their land and will in the coming year implement a ranch plan with them. Field days and opportunities to learn at the ranch level will be implemented. Funding is required and applications to interested foundations are in process. We are preparing with Ecojustice to participate as fight the city of Medicine Hat and LGX Oil take their case to to have the Emergency Protection Order overturned to court.

WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT

AWA is represented on the joint federal-provincial recovery team for westslope cutthroat trout. Few populations of pure-strain native cutthroat trout remain in Alberta, and recovery will require improved management of headwater streams, particularly with regard to management of motorized access and forest harvest. The Government of Alberta approved a recovery plan for the species in March 2013. Associated with this plan, several pure-strain westslope cutthroat spawning streams were re-designated in May 2013 as Class 'A' with accompanying stringent restrictions on use and development. Notwithstanding the designation, and a directive from ESRD to treat those streams as Class 'A' even before the designation became official, there have been cases in the C5 Forest Management Unit where enough deviations were granted to forestry companies as to render the designation meaningless. The Hidden Creek FOIP process revealed protecting native trout habitat was not as high a priority for ESRD as was the timber quota in the C5. AWA is disappointed with the lack of urgency required to stabilize and recover pure-strain westslope cutthroat trout populations.

Also in March 2013, Alberta's population of Westslope cutthroat trout was finally designated as **threatened** under the federal **Species at Risk Act** (SARA). This came seven years after the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada called for the threatened designation. The designation was made because native populations of this fish have been "drastically reduced, by almost 80%, due to over-exploitation, habitat degradation and hybridization/competition with non-native trout." The Alberta recovery plan became part of a proposed federal recovery strategy released in December 2013. AWA consulted with several fish and SARA law experts to submit informed comments on this proposed recovery strategy. AWA stressed in our comments the need to expand on the proposed critical habitat designation of "bankfull waterbodies where pure strain westslope cutthroat trout exist" to include riparian vegetation zones surrounding the waterbodies as well as other elements that were missing from the limited designation. The final federal recovery strategy was released at the end of March 2014 with few changes from the proposed strategy. AWA and Ecojustice sent in a demand letter to the Ministers of Environment and Fisheries and Oceans informing them of unlawful aspects of the recovery strategy. An upcoming meeting is scheduled between AWA staff, AWA fish biologist volunteers, and both federal and provincial representatives involved with westslope cutthroat trout recovery.

LIMBER AND WHITEBARK PINE

Whitebark pine has been proposed for addition to the federal Species at Risk list, and AWA has also worked towards having limber pine receive the same status. A provincial recovery team has been established for both species, and AWA continues to monitor progress. A draft recovery plan is still awaited.

OTHER SPECIES AT RISK

AWA continues to monitor and provide input to the progress of recovery processes for other wildlife, including proposed additions to the federal Species at Risk Act, including bank swallow and Gibson's Big Sand Tiger Beetle.

Once again, AWA opposed renewed proposals to introduce a hunting season for sandhill cranes (listed as "sensitive" in Alberta). We noted that sandhill crane continued to be vulnerable, there are lingering doubts about population estimates and there is a persistent risk of "accidental" kill of endangered whooping cranes.

In April 2014, AWA wrote to the provincial Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, requesting the immediate removal of all nine of Alberta's native bat species from the Non-Licence Animal List. AWA pointed out that hibernating and migratory bat species are facing imminent risk of significantly reduced populations from disease and wind turbine deaths, respectively, and require formal protection instead of being considered "pests."

In November 2013, AWA wrote to the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, calling for the suspension of all applications of neonicotinoids until a thorough independent review is completed of effects on terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates, birds and mammals.

PROTECTED AREAS PROGRESS

ALBERTA'S PROVINCIALY PROTECTED AREAS

Alberta's protected areas network includes six federally-protected National Parks (Banff, Jasper, Waterton, Wood Buffalo and Elk Island) as well as a series of provincially-protected areas. The Government of Alberta's *Alberta Land Reference Manual* provides data on number and area of provincially protected areas. (www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/library/land-reference-manual.aspx) Almost all of the changes since 2013 in the table below are due to new protected areas created through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan. (It should be noted those new protected areas do not yet appear on the website listed above, although their sizes can be calculated from maps posted to the Land Use Framework website at landuse.alberta.ca/ResultsResources/Pages/MapsandShapefiles.aspx.) New protected areas created through the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan do not yet appear in the data set as they are still pending approval; it is hoped that they will appear in the 2015 table.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Number</i>		<i>Acres</i>		<i>Hectares</i>	
	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	1	1,135,872.00	1,135,872.00	459,671.04	459,671.04
Ecological Reserves	15	15	66,329.29	66,329.29	26,843.34	26,843.34
Wilderness Areas	3	3	249,548.80	249,548.80	100,988.79	100,988.79
Wildland Parks	36	32	7,217,943.50	4,278,338.96	2,921,009.77	1,731,439.59
Heritage Rangelands	2	2	29,677.84	29,677.84	12,010.47	12,010.47
Provincial Parks	75	75	566,151.00	546,053.38	225,066.37	220,987.19
Natural Areas	139	139	321,090.99	318,441.52	129,943.98	128,871.98
Provincial Recreation Areas	215	208	329,691.71	217,180.71	133,421.50	87,891.71
T O T A L	486	475	9,916,305.13	6,841,442.50	4,008,955.26	2,768,704.11

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

COMMISSION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) is an international organization created by Canada, Mexico and the United States to address regional environmental concerns, help prevent potential trade and environmental conflicts, and to promote the effective enforcement of environmental law.

AWA continues to emphasize the important role that the CEC Secretariat can play in facilitating activities related to capacity building and information sharing. AWA looks forward to continuing to advance grassland biodiversity conservation at the continental level with renewed and always valuable efforts from the CEC.

TEMPERATE GRASSLAND CONSERVATION

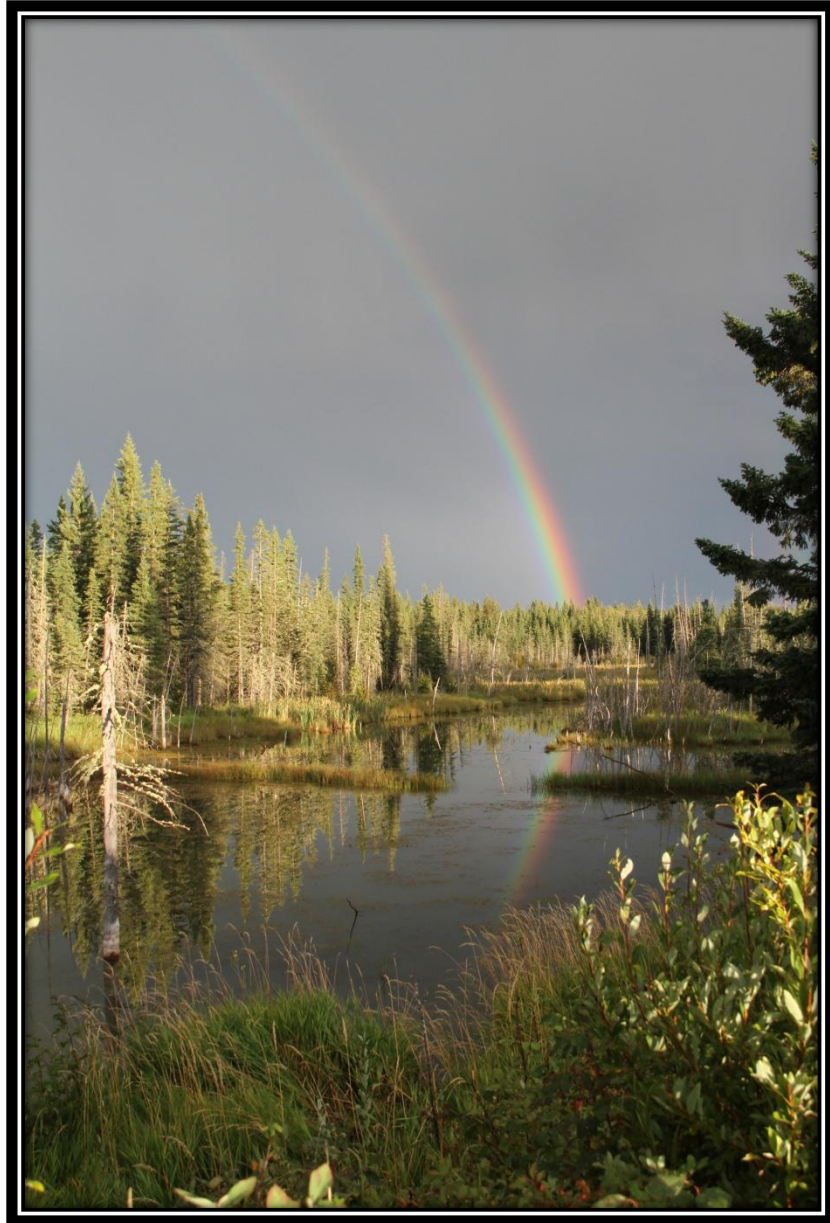
In an effort to increase the rate of progress in conserving and protecting temperate grasslands, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's World Commission on Protected Areas created the Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force, now a Specialist Group, in 1996. This Specialist Group launched the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative (TGCI) in June 2008 at an International Grasslands Congress workshop in Hohhot, China in which the 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. In North America, the TGCI is working on revitalizing the Northern Plains Conservation Network as well as supporting the work of the Crossing the Medicine Line Network. AWA continues to receive materials and participate in TGCI discussions on an ad hoc basis.

NORTHERN PLAINS CONSERVATION NETWORK

NPCN is a network of more than 25 organizations working together to conserve the wildlife and habitat of the Northern Plains. With assistance from groups including the AWA, the NPCN has hired a part-time coordinator and is working on three big initiatives: energy, grassland birds and bison. Grassland birds initiatives have focal areas in southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan, including campaigns to secure long-term protection for Onefour Research Farm in Alberta and Govenlock (and other) PFRA pastures in Saskatchewan. The futures of these sites are uncertain, as they are being relinquished by the Government of Canada to the provinces, despite their importance for recovery of many species at risk in Canada.

TWINNING OF TWO SIGNIFICANT INTERNATIONAL RAMSAR SITES

The international cooperation that has been achieved through the twinning of Hay-Zama Lakes in Alberta and Dalai Lake Nature Reserve is valued and the friendships created from the will to defend natural places are significant. It has already resulted in increased resources and protection for each of these two sites involved in this international partnership. Lack of staffing in Hay-Zama Wildland Park has made it difficult for Alberta to maintain its agreement for support of the Dalai Lakes staff.



STRENGTH AND CAPACITY

Our members are the force and means of Alberta Wilderness Association. We continue to evaluate operations, develop capacity, and reorganize based on strategic directions. AWA displays leadership capacity by reinvigorating its organization, developing staff skill, and renewing efforts with strategies and tactics to meet our mission. AWA is determined to continue to play a leadership role, build community partnerships, and focus on our grassroots connections. Our members and supporters are of utmost importance. Our members and supporters throughout the province and around the World 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.

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

WILD LANDS ADVOCATE



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

The journal reports news and information about the work of AWA and its supporters. It tells the stories of Wild Alberta, and the people involved, through investigation and personal accounts. It provides timely, accurate, interesting, and useful information to AWA supporters and the general public by using news, stories, and perspectives on issues pertaining to Alberta's wilderness and

AWA's work. AWA staff takes ownership and leadership for articles in the WLA, and a team effort has increased its readability and relevance. The WLA is published in full colour six times annually. The editor of the WLA is Ian Urquhart.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS RESOURCE CENTRE

Wilderness Resource Centre archiving and cataloguing continued to move forward this year. Specifically a paper archive of critical administrative records has been digitized with paper records sealed and stored. The bar code inventory system had a second pass completing the work of bar coding all bound publications. Our on-line catalogue database is partially developed, and continued development and growth of the Electronic Wilderness Resource



Centre (EWRC), so that we have top of the line technology and storage capacity, is in place. We are routinely filing in the EWRC, building our collection and the historical records of wilderness in Alberta. We have also instituted a daily routine for external back up of the EWRC. Paper filing is minimal as we have made a significant transition to electronic filing and storage; staff is opting for electronic storage as much as possible. The electronic system facilitates ease of sharing and secure storage. Two major donations of materials to the library were received from the estates of Roger Creasy and Dawn Dickinson. As well historical files from Bow Valley Naturalists have been received and using funds provided by Shell Canada for the Roger Creasy Memorial Library we have employed a part time librarian to incorporate all of these files and materials into the paper and digital library.



ONLINE PRESENCE

AWA made a move to have its major website and resource hosted in Canada over the service we had in the United States. The platform for the website was changed and development was completed enough that we were able to go live with the new site in September. The transition went well and we have an updated and refreshed website. Archival materials are still being reformatted and posted to the new site and it will take a number of months to complete the process. We are more comfortable with our Canadian host and the technology that is in place. We have made good progress in maintaining content on the sites and believe these websites are key to our outreach work.

We have a first rate electronic newsletter service that has eliminated difficulty in delivering important messages to members, supporters and those who have self-selected to be on the lists. Changes to laws regarding the use of electronic newsletters in Canada, came into effect this year. AWA responded to Canadian Anti Spam Legislation (CASL) and

renewed its list of subscribers keeping abreast of the new law and regulations. We have lost subscribers from our lists but feel more confident that the current lists are working well.

We have received recognition from colleagues and others for our ability to get the news out quickly to a broad audience.

AWA has three primary websites:

- www.AlbertaWilderness.ca (major information and resource site)
- www.ClimbforWilderness.ca (Earth Day event site)
- www.GoWildAlberta.ca (online purchasing and donation site)

and three single issue websites:

- www.SavetheGrizzlies.ca
- www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com
- www.AbWild.ca/Forests
- www.AbWild.ca/Water

The three main list serve newsletters are:

- General AWA News and Events (1197 addresses on this list)
- Media News (103 outlets on this list)

Wilderness & Wildlife Defenders (folks who will take action, write letters, respond to issues; 620 on this list)

We also have lists that are specific to various campaigns and events:

Climb for Wilderness (791 addresses across three related lists)

Gala (422 addresses)

Sage-grouse Partnership list, Fish and Forests list, etc.

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

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE DEFENDERS

AWA's Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Defenders program continues to give people the opportunity to have an active voice in some of the decisions being made that affect Alberta's wilderness and wildlife. More than 600 participants are contacted through AWA's online listserv. Throughout the year, alerts were sent out on a variety of issues ranging from fixed roof structures proposed in Lakeland to opposing the Sandhill Crane hunt. AWA receives numerous copies of letters and emails sent by participants as part of this program.

HIKES, TALKS, FILMS AND TOURS OUTREACH PROGRAM



The summer hike season went well with only two hikes cancelled. One hike planned for west of Edmonton along the North Saskatchewan River valley that was cancelled due to lack of registrations and a Beehive Natural Area south of Kananaskis Country was cancelled because access was still unavailable from the 2013 floods. Overall the year saw nine hikes, one snowshoeing trip and two bus tours take 153 guests into five of Alberta's six natural regions. These numbers point to a strong program that continues to meet with success in its goal of exposing the public to the natural beauty of these wilderness areas, and

helping fulfill the awareness aspect of AWA's mission. The hikes program continues to recognize importance of the outreach program as a means for keeping in contact with the local community that lives in and around AWA's areas of concern and problems with coordination have been resolved with the addition of our third Conservation Specialist.

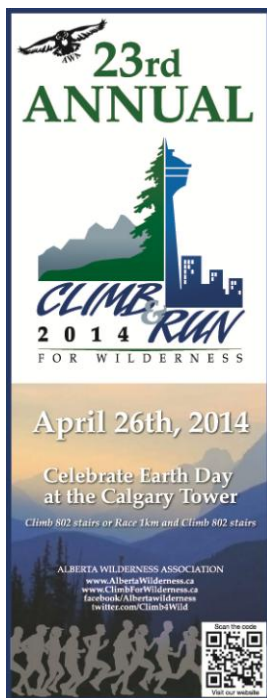
The slate of Tuesday Talks for this year saw excellent turnouts. Eight talks and a public forum at the Hillhurst school plus two members' nights in Edmonton brought an audience of over 450 to hear about AWA's work and concerns throughout the province. Another informal Edmonton munch and mingle was held at the Wild Earth Cafe which proved to be successful. Every talk was very well attended, several of them selling out, with great speakers and lively discussions on a broad range of wilderness related topics.

MUSIC FOR THE WILD

The sixth year of the Music for the Wild program continued, under consistent volunteer coordination by George Campbell, to attract a segment of the population that does not often get wide exposure to AWA's outreach and messaging. Music for the Wild events during the 2013-2014 season were extremely successful and each one sold out. They prove to be an excellent venue for selling memberships and merchandise, in addition to spreading awareness. This year, five music nights were attended by approximately 350 people, with wonderful feedback about the program. We look forward to continuing this relatively new AWA tradition in the years to come.

SUMMER WILDERNESS DEFENDERS KIDS' CAMP

Brand new this year, AWA organized a children's day camp for one week in August. We had eight kids participate in the camp and their enthusiasm was instrumental in making it an absolute success. It was a good way to introduce new families to AWA and inspire youth to learn about and appreciate their natural environment. The campers helped build and decorate a bat box, went on a nature walk to identify birds and plants, made their own camp t-shirts and seed paper, explored the living critters of a pond at Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park, played riparian bingo near the Bow River, and many more great activities. The campers also created their very own wilderness projects which they presented to AWA staff, camp leaders, and all the parents at the end of the week.



EARTH DAY - CLIMB AND RUN FOR WILDERNESS AND THE WILD ALBERTA EXPO

AWA's Annual Earth Day event held at the Calgary Tower is an outstanding event, held to increase public awareness of wilderness, wildlife and wild water in Alberta. The *Climb and Run for Wilderness* attracts participants from 2 to 96 years old, with a diverse range of athletic ability. A family day, a corporate challenge day, a fun time, and a serious opportunity to test one's personal best are all combined in this event. The event is known as the best Earth Day event in western Canada and this year attracted nearly 2,000 individual participants, volunteers, exhibitors, family and friends and other spectators. The Climb and Run for Wilderness receives significant media attention from such outlets as the Calgary Herald, Global, CBC and City TV as well as many local radio stations. The event attracts people from all over western Canada and the United States and results in \$100,000 in donations to AWA. Conservation groups and vendors set up displays throughout the Calgary Tower mall to help participants learn about their work and or their environmentally-focused products.

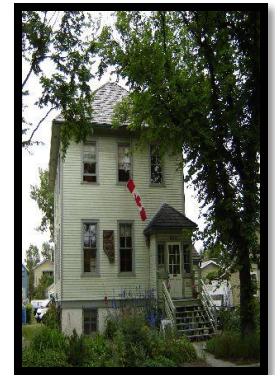
In the month prior to the climb day AWA holds a Mural Painting Competition that has produced an amazing gallery of murals on the walls of the stairwell. With more than 150 murals featuring wild lands, wildlife and wild water, the opportunity for artists to showcase their talents and for climbers to feel refreshed and inspired, the mural competition yields one of the signature aspects of the Climb and Run for Wilderness.

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

The 23rd annual Climb and Run for Wilderness was held at the Calgary Tower on April 19, 2014. This year's event was attended by roughly 2,000 people, including 1,300 climbers plus their families and other spectators, volunteers and more, and constituted the single largest outreach opportunity in the AWA calendar. The athletic events of the day are complemented by the Wild Alberta Expo, an environmental fair held at the base of the tower, which is now in its eleventh year. In addition to entertainment and music, the expo incorporated 30 displays from environmental organizations across Calgary and Alberta. The Expo was bookended by two AWA displays that used this excellent opportunity to educate attendees on AWA's conservation work. The event was successful in reducing waste significantly with the introduction of a Zero Waste initiative that will be continued in years to come.

HILLHURST COTTAGE SCHOOL

As reported last year, the City of Calgary is disposing of the school, AWA's home for almost 40 years. The City provided a proposal to AWA in June and the Board of Directors have finalized a deal with the City. The sale will close June 15, 2015 and we have begun fundraising. We are optimistic that based on donations that have arrived at the time of writing this report, we can raise enough funds to avoid a mortgage.



COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the year, AWA participated in a wide range of community events, including conferences, workshops and talks. Brief examples out of the hundreds include participation at various ENGO AGMs, such as those for the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance and the Prairie Conservation Forum; attendance at Bow River, Red Deer River and other watershed alliance planning meetings; participation in Southern Foothills community meetings, presentations to school groups, water presentations to various community groups, and more.

As is the case every year, AWA has continued to be active in the wider community, putting up displays at several farmers markets as well as specialized events such as the Marda Loop Justice Film Festival, and similar other venues. While it can be difficult to estimate the number of people that take the opportunity to view the displays, these events remain an excellent opportunity to engage with the community and raise awareness.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

In concert with International Migratory Bird Day in May 2014, AWA performed outreach and advocacy work publicizing the situation of the greater sage-grouse in southeast Alberta, and more widely, issues pertaining to threats to migratory bird species that use the grasslands. This included a display at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary that prompted many productive discussions with attendees, and followed on similar outreach work performed in 2013.

FINANCING WILDERNESS PROTECTION

REVENUE

Funds received from donations by members, supporters and fundraising are vital to the health of AWA and provided 90% of our total revenue. Granting agencies in this year included Alberta Sport Recreation Parks and Wildlife Foundation and The Calgary Foundation. We have achieved our strategic goal to decrease dependence on foundation grants and we depend largely on individual donor financial support.

Funding generated through events comes from our annual Earth Day event, Climb and Run for Wilderness; and the Wild West Gala in the fall. Funds raised at casinos are part of this category and our next casino is in December 2014 and we did receive casino funds during our 2013 - 2014 fiscal year. Fundraising and gifts from donors allow AWA to be financially independent and free to speak out for wilderness protection. In the past few years we have had strength in our reserves as a target and we have been building our position in regard to cash flow. Our end of year financial statements reflect our success as we build a reserve fund for the Association's general health and a building fund that we will need for the purchase of the Hillhurst Cottage School June 15, 2015. Our voting membership has grown modestly in the past year and stands at 4,756 individuals; representing 201 communities in Alberta, in addition to national and international members. We hope that a strong focus on membership development in the coming year will assist in creating a larger donor base.

EXPENDITURES

The main focus of our organization is wilderness stewardship, conservation, and outreach; the expenditures in this category include the Alberta Wilderness Resource Centre. This category accounts appropriately for the largest portion of our expenditures (70%). 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 developing membership and supporters as well as applying for grants. We did spend less in this category than in other years as we were able to depend on a good deal of volunteer support while we continued to achieve important growth this year. General and administrative costs of 15% represent an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism. Rent, insurance, telephone, office equipment and supplies, bank charges, audit charges, travel, and non-recoverable GST are included in General and Administration costs.

REVIEW ENGAGEMENT REPORT

AWA engages Roberts and Company Professional Accountants LLP to review AWA's statement of financial position each year. Their Review Engagement Report states that based on Roberts and Company review, 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.

**ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
(Unaudited)**

AS AT JULY 31, 2014

	2014 Operating Fund	2014 Restricted Funds	2014 Total	2013 Total
ASSETS				
CURRENT				
Cash and cash equivalents (Note 2)	\$ 902,550	\$ 2,810	\$ 905,360	\$ 726,890
Marketable securities (Note 3)	3,522	-	3,522	4,010
Accrued interest receivable	646	-	646	-
Prepaid expenses	6,595	-	6,595	5,434
GST receivable	2,047	-	2,047	2,700
Donated items held for auction	8,735	-	8,735	6,602
Deposit on building and land (Note 9)	66,000	-	66,000	-
	<u>\$ 990,095</u>	<u>\$ 2,810</u>	<u>\$ 992,905</u>	<u>\$ 745,636</u>
LIABILITIES				
CURRENT				
Accounts payable and accrued	\$ 17,571	\$ -	\$ 17,571	\$ 14,319
Wages payable	1,429	-	1,429	-
Payroll remittances payable	8,262	-	8,262	5,865
Deferred income	10,110	-	10,110	11,855
	<u>37,372</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>37,372</u>	<u>32,039</u>
Commitment (Note 9)				
FUND BALANCES				
Unrestricted	952,723	-	952,723	713,377
Restricted	-	2,810	2,810	220
	<u>952,723</u>	<u>2,810</u>	<u>955,533</u>	<u>713,597</u>
	<u>\$ 990,095</u>	<u>\$ 2,810</u>	<u>\$ 992,905</u>	<u>\$ 745,636</u>

**ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION
STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS AND CHANGES IN FUND BALANCES
(Unaudited)**

FOR THE YEAR ENDED JULY 31, 2014

	2014 Operating Fund	2014 Restricted Funds	2014 Total	2013 Total
REVENUES				
General donations	\$ 555,360	\$ -	\$ 555,360	\$ 582,698
Fundraising donations	105,204	-	105,204	106,179
Grants (Note 4)	84,498	-	84,498	80,292
Investment income	6,881	-	6,881	3,658
Membership revenue	2,325	-	2,325	2,841
Honorariums	2,176	-	2,176	1,909
Casino	-	67,147	67,147	-
	<u>756,444</u>	<u>67,147</u>	<u>823,591</u>	<u>777,577</u>
EXPENSES				
Wilderness stewardship and outreach	346,264	59,551	405,815	408,879
General and administration	77,633	2,725	80,358	86,395
Development	95,482	-	95,482	42,364
	<u>519,379</u>	<u>62,276</u>	<u>581,655</u>	<u>537,638</u>
EXCESS OF REVENUE OVER EXPENSES	237,065	4,871	241,936	239,939
FUNDS TRANSFER	2,281	(2,281)	-	-
FUND BALANCES, beginning of year	713,377	220	713,597	473,658
FUND BALANCES, end of year	\$ 952,723	\$ 2,810	\$ 955,533	\$ 713,597

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. Each year our financial position strengthens.

BEQUESTS

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

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE BEQUESTS

Daphne M. Smith 1980
Dr. James Birkett Cragg 1997
Anna Nowick 1999
Myrtle Muriel Koch 2001
Ian Ross 2003
Dorothy Barry 2003
William Mayer 2004
Diane Hughes 2005
Harold deVries 2009
Ann Roberts 2009
Richard Collier 2013

LIFETIME GIVING

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

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE BENEFACTORS

(LIFETIME GIVING GREATER THAN \$20,000)

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

Anonymous
Dorothy Berry & the Berndt Family
Clint and Julie Docken
Chris and Ken Havard
Mary Kettenbach
Laura Jackson
Linda and Jusuf Javeri
Anthony and Liz Fricke

MEMORIAL TRIBUTES

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

Donations in Memoriam 2013-2014

Irene Anderson 1920-2014	Ainsley Kelly 1987-2014
Paul K. Anderson 1927-2014	Charles Lacy 1933-2013
Danny Cameron 1962-2014	David Manzer 2006
Gene Cervo 1954-2013	Murray Manzer
Jim Clampett 1933-2014	Elsie Mole 1936-2014
Dawn Dickinson 1930-2013	Zoe Preston 1921-2013
Steven Dixon 1917-2014	Alice Schwieger 1932-2013
Gordon Dunford 1925 - 2014	William Sokil 1931-2014
Stanley G. Swettenham 2012	Sharon Tranter 1940-2013
Rita Grier 1933-2013	Evan Williams 1926-2013
Aileen Hadden 1931-2013	Robert Williams 1943-2013
Helen Holstead 2014	Joseph Zaremba 1973-2014
Benjamin Karasek 1924-2014	

ALBERTA WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST

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

The Trust began in 1986 as a memorial fund established as a tribute to biologist Orval Pall. Throughout the years, families seeking to remember their own loved ones have found solace and strength in devoting resources to the memorial fund, which was dedicated to support the protection of wilderness in Alberta. On the fifteenth anniversary of the fund, AWA established the Trust as an endowment fund with the Calgary Foundation in order to support the long-term sustainability of the Association. The Trust will support wilderness programs and research that contribute to the protection, understanding, and appreciation of wilderness, wild waters, and wildlife. The current 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 \$24823.77. The endowment fund's annual distribution (2014 – \$996.00) is dedicated to the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture and the Wilderness Defender Awards.

ANNUAL WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST GUEST LECTURE

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

Martha Kostuch was 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 2013 lecture was given by Lorraine Mitchelmore, President and CEO of Shell Canada. AWA's struggles and at times difficult history working with Shell Canada set the stage for how we have evolved through the years, to this point where we do work together and as Mitchelmore explained, where environmental concerns are not the last item on the agenda but often are considered at the very beginning of proposals and day-to-day decisions.

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. The Alberta Wilderness Association 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 Roger Creasy, posthumously and accepted by his widow Mona. Roger worked tirelessly in government, industry and the university to create better standards for practice and more inclusive opportunities for conservation and the public in general.

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.

HOPE FOR TOMORROW

Each year I complete this annual report in November and while the report is based on the year ending July 31, 2014. The dedication, integrity and passion of AWA's staff and board members is the core of our ability to keep moving forward. I am pleased to say that the long-term financial stability needed is less of an issue this year and we are in an excellent financial position despite plans to purchase the Hillhurst Cottage School building. The generosity of every donor and our continually declining dependence on grants and foundation funding allows us to continue working to build financial security. That effort and the security we have in place is what allows our staff to work freely, pursuing every possible lead, facing every challenge and developing expertise to represent AWA and its members with conviction and well researched, sound arguments. Above all however, is the absolute certainty that we care and we will take a stand and we will have *Hope for Tomorrow*.

Christyann Olson



