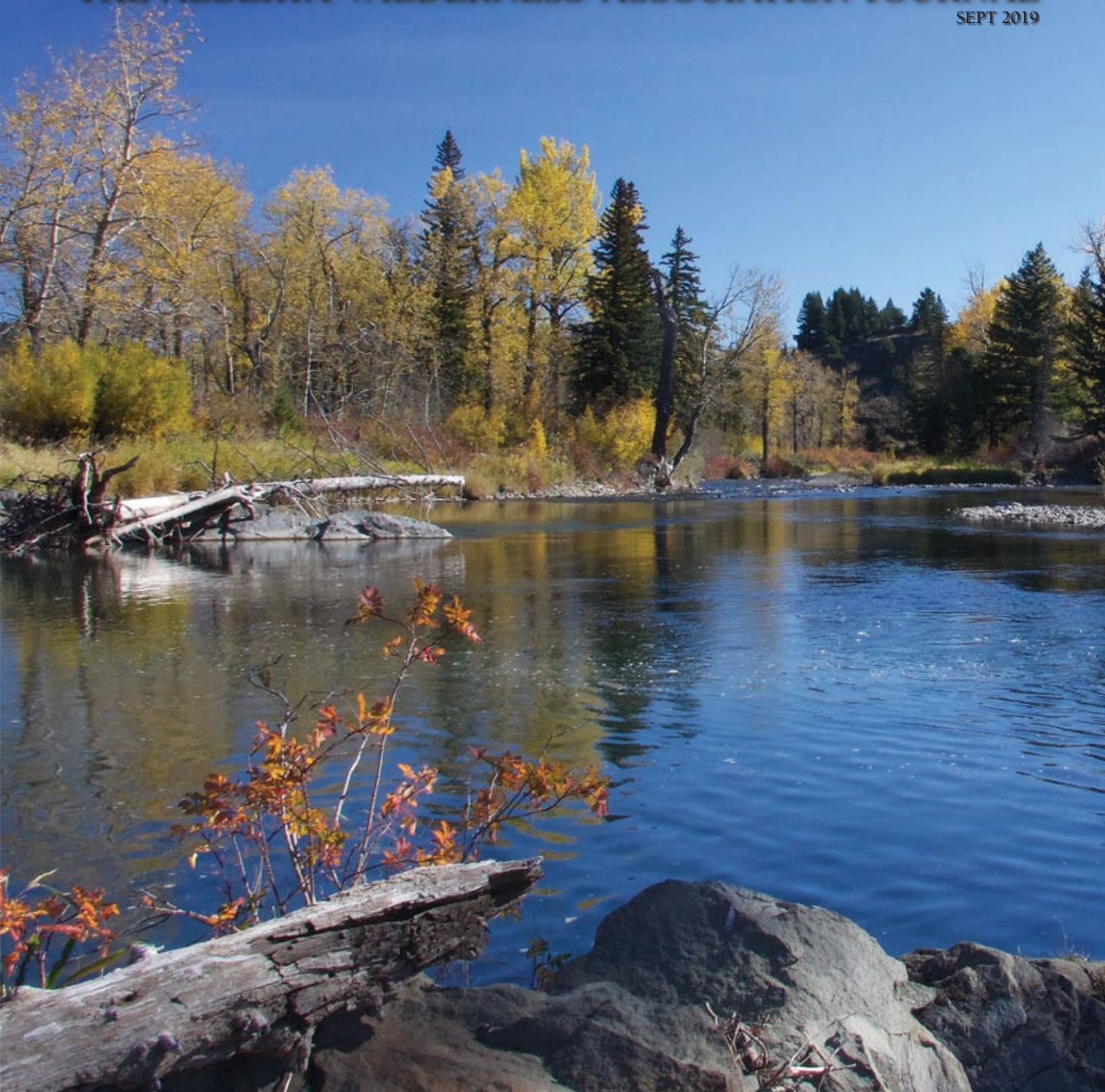


A WILDLANDS ADVOCATE



THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

SEPT 2019



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Cover Photo

The first week of October along the Crowsnest River... not in 2019
© I. URQUHART



Featured Art

It's a privilege for AWA to feature the art of Lisa Brawn in this issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate*. Lisa is a Calgary based artist specializing in painted woodcut blocks. Her work graces public collections such as The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Calgary Civic Art Collection, and the University of Lethbridge collection. It also features in private collections across Canada, Europe, and the United States. In Calgary, her work has been featured on banners for Calgary bridges, Calgary parks, and Fort Calgary. There also is a large scale permanent installation of her woodblocks at Inglewood's Festival Hall.

In her twenty-year career as a professional artist, Lisa has had 25 solo exhibitions and participated in more than 40 group exhibitions across North America – from Victoria, Seattle, and Los Angeles to Halifax, Chicago, and New Orleans. She received international attention for *Helios* – her large scale, interactive, solar-powered sculptural installation at the Leighton Art Centre. *Helios* was featured on CBC's *As It Happens* and reported in media outlets from Canada to Brazil.

Please visit Lisa's website at www.lisabrawn.com.

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ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

Dedicated to the conservation of wilderness and the completion of a protected areas network, **Alberta Wilderness Association** is a voice for the environment. Since 1965, AWA has inspired communities to care for Alberta's wild spaces through awareness and action. With a provincial office and library in Calgary, AWA has active members, volunteers, and sponsors throughout Alberta and beyond. AWA is a non-profit, federally registered, charitable society. Donations and financial support are greatly appreciated, please call 403 283-2025 or contribute online at AlbertaWilderness.ca

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The Proverbial Glass

Is it half-empty or half-full? Conservationists who think it is half-empty have plenty of evidence to support their view. Look, for example, at a just-published study in *Science*. It documents stunning losses in North American bird populations over less than 50 years. North America has lost nearly three billion, that's right...billion, birds. Since 1970 the population has fallen by 29 percent. Continent-wide, those losses are greatest in Alberta's two largest natural regions – the boreal forest and the grasslands. Remember 1970? Surely some of you do. That was the year the first Earth Day was held. I could go on.

But, despite plenty of evidence showing the glass is (at least) half-empty, a healthy portion of this issue of *Wild Lands Advocate* aims to show the glass is half-full. It does this, not by congratulating governments for actions we know are woefully insufficient, but instead by looking at what individuals are doing. It's individuals... their recognition of the need to speak out and act if governments won't... that gives me cause to think the glass may be half-full after all. The same goes for the groundswell of demands from publics all around the world that governments must deliver much more than the platitudes and half-measures they've concocted so far. An estimated four million people, many of them young people, marched through streets around the world demanding climate change action. As they chanted in New York: "You had a future, so should we." So true.

Here, it's the individuals you'll read about, people like Peter Sherrington, Jill Seaton, the Viponds, Owen Duke, Patsy Cotterill, and attendees at the Keepers of the Water gathering, who help make the glass half full. It's their individual actions, and the collective actions they contribute to, that cast some brightness on these times.

If you're unconvinced that individual actions matter I invite you to read Justin Rowlett's story, "Climate change action: We can't all be Greta, but your choices have a ripple effect," on the BBC website

(<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-49756280>). It might change your mind.

There I found Peter Singer's views particularly compelling. A political philosopher, some of you may recognize Singer for his support for animal rights. In the BBC story, however, he discusses climate change and invokes the idea of harm to others. As individuals, we have a moral obligation not to behave in ways that harm others. For example, my individual freedom doesn't give me the right to travel to the Arctic and wantonly slaughter animals vital to the subsistence lifestyle of some Inuit. In this case, my moral obligation to the Inuit is enforced by the law. Singer regards my failure to cut my emissions as analogous to slaughtering animals in the Arctic. My failure to act, or to demand that governments enforce this moral obligation in the context of climate change measures, further endangers the future of Arctic peoples. I'm harming Arctic peoples whether I slaughter animals or don't reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

So why not try to think that, when it comes to climate change or other conservation issues, we have a moral obligation to other individuals regardless of whether they live next door or a continent away. Let's give it a try. What do we have to lose?

- Ian Urquhart



Citizens:

Putting the “C” Into Conservation

By Ian Urquhart



Many readers are likely familiar with the phrase “direct action.” The histories of the labour, suffragette, civil rights, and environmental movements are decorated with stories where people, frustrated with government’s failure to respect their interests and goals, directly confronted authorities to demand change. The thread joining all of these protest movements together was their decision to avoid traditional paths of political influence such as parliaments or bureaucracy. Instead, protests and strikes were the signatures of direct action.

The focus in this article, like in a discussion of direct action, is on conservation-oriented citizens who supplement or perhaps bypass altogether official methods of influence such as lobbying or voting. Instead, they are helping to build the scientific basis for conservation action by gathering data. They are, in a real sense, “citizen scientists.” The number of projects in Alberta with citizen science components is impressive. Three of those projects – a very, very small sample of citizen science endeavours – are noted here. If you have a favourite citizen science project you would like us to bring to the attention of *Advocate* readers please drop me a line at iurquhart@abwild.ca.

Counting Raptors with the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation

In 2017 CBC described the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation’s spring and fall raptor counts as “one of the largest and longest-running citizen science projects in the world.” The Foundation (see the

eaglewatch.ca website) was the brainchild of Peter Sherrington. Peter was inspired to create this non-profit by an anomaly. Why, he wondered back in March 1992, did he see so many golden eagles flying northwest past Mount Lorette in Kananaskis Country. After counting just over 100 eagles on that day, Peter counted hundreds more over the next few days. By chance, Peter had discovered a golden eagle migration route. He had discovered the flyway that golden eagles use as they migrate in the spring and fall between as far away as Alaska/the Yukon to central Mexico.

Mount Royal University’s Sarah Hewitt noted in a 2018 *Canadian Geographic* article that, since 1992, the Foundation’s “thousands of volunteer scientists have logged more than 30,000 hours in the field, and recorded sightings of more than 24,000 golden eagles.” In that article Peter likened the ridges of the front range of the Rockies to “long, elevated prairie roads.” The eagles and other raptors use thermals – upward currents of warm air – to soar above the front range and conserve their energy during their migrations.

The Foundation’s website contains a very comprehensive database about golden eagle and other raptor sightings. The 2018 final report on the fall migration, as one example, offers the reader a wealth of information. Volunteers now collect data at three locations: Mount Lorette, Vicki Ridge near the east end of Crowsnest Pass, and the Steeples site near Cranbrook B.C. (the Steeples site is along a second migration corridor that runs through the Rocky Mountain Trench). At 2,698 golden eagles,

observers counted 21.3 percent fewer birds than the long-term average in the fall 2018 count at Mount Lorette. This total was produced by an astounding 532.7 hours of observations from the 21 principal observers and assistants who attended the site between September 20th and November 15th. This decline unfortunately reflects the general trend recorded at the Mount Lorette site since 2003. To my eyes, perhaps the most positive data from the 2018 report concerned the immature:adult golden eagle ratio. At 0.42 this ratio was 40 percent above average; it was the third highest ratio every recorded there. Like the ratio of juvenile birds to subadults and adults, this immature/adult ratio indicated that the 2018 breeding season was very productive.

When you read this article the fall 2019 count will be underway (it runs from September 20th to November 15th). Visitors are welcome at the Foundation’s Hay Meadow observation station. More details can be found at the eaglewatch.ca website. Since October is the busiest month of the fall migration we have a wonderful opportunity to become more familiar with the valuable work of these citizen scientists.

Waterton’s Annual Butterfly Count

The butterfly is one of our smaller, but most beautiful, barometers of ecosystem health. For 20 years now, a butterfly count has been a fixture of summertime activities in Waterton Lakes National Park. Kim Pearson, an ecosystem scientist with the Waterton/Bar-U Ranch Field Unit of Parks Canada, co-founded the count while she was a stu-

dent working with Parks Canada in 1999. Every year since volunteers, butterfly nets in hand, head out into various areas of the park looking for butterflies. Parks Canada staff teach the volunteers to use the “swish and flick” technique to capture the butterflies; any butterflies caught by the volunteers are brought to the group leader for identification. As Pearson told Doug Dirks, host of CBC’s *The Homestretch*: “We take them out of the nets very gently, are very careful with them, identify them and then we release them back into the Park so we don’t have any impact on their populations.”

Between 1999 and 2018, nearly 1,500 butterflies representing 105 species had been caught and released during Waterton’s annual counts. The number of species caught each year has ranged between 12 and 52. As noted above, butterflies are one barometer of ecosystem health. This is reflected in facts such as their importance as pollinators and their sensitivity to pesticides. According to Pearson, “butterflies are doing really well in Waterton...(there is) a lot of diversity here.” The 2017 Kenow wildfire doesn’t appear to have damaged butterfly diversity health in the park. In 2018, the count recorded at least an average number of butterflies. Last year stood out for the appearance of the two-tailed swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio multicaudata*) in the count. Although two-tailed swallowtails had been seen before, 2018 was the first year one was caught and released during the count.

After the 2019 count Pearson intended to use the database established over the past 20 years to construct a synopsis of the counts. Here she hopes to work with scientists who have an expertise in Alberta’s butterflies. How much credence should we give to such a synopsis? Likely quite a bit according to an article by Soroye, Ahmed, and Kerr published in 2018. They examined the contribution opportunistic citizen science could make to better understanding the richness, distributions, and phenologies of butterflies. They compared the data obtained from an opportunistic citizen science program with data from pro-



Two-tailed swallowtail (Papilio multicaudata)
PHOTO: By ALAN SCHMIERER (courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

fessional surveys. The eButterfly program, launched in 2011, allows butterfly enthusiasts to build a database of butterfly sightings that may be shared with anyone. Its originators hope that this growing database “will become the foundation for a better understanding of butterfly distribution and population trends across North American and beyond.” The Soroye/Ahmed/Kerr comparative study found real value in this

example of opportunistic citizen science. They wrote: “Our results suggest that data from opportunistic CS programs in conjunction with professional datasets can strongly increase the capacity of researchers to estimate species richness, and provide unique information on species distributions and phenologies that are relevant to the detection of the biological consequences of global change.”



One of Parks Canada’s volunteer butterfly experts explaining how to catch butterflies to other volunteers at the start of the 2018 Waterton butterfly count. PHOTO: © PARKS CANADA

Bow Valley Naturalists' High Elevation Localized Species Project

Since 2010 the Bow Valley Naturalists (BVN) has included a webpage people may use to record sightings of four High Elevation Localized Species (HELS): hoary marmot, mountain goat, pika, and white-tailed ptarmigan. The HELS project exemplifies opportunistic citizen science; this type of program invites participants/volunteers to report their observations of these four species from anywhere at any time. Currently, more than 250 people are registered on the HELS website. You can use one of two methods to record a sighting. You can click the location on a map or you can input UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator) coordinates. Since it's vital for locations to be reported accurately the BVN recommends you use points fixed by GPS units. What I plan to do is use my GPS app to record the latitude/longitude of a sighting and then convert those coordinates to UTM ones when I get back home (I find the Latitude/Longitude to UTM converter at <https://www.latlong.net/lat-long-utm.html> easy to use).

The BVN started this project to provide essential baseline information about these species. As anyone who has done policy research will attest to, this vital data too

often hasn't been gathered and the knowledge baselines needed to formulate good policy then are shrouded in uncertainty. If this project improves our knowledge of the distribution of these species the BVN hopes that knowledge "will set the stage for research directed at assessing human impacts by evaluating those features in the landscape that most influence gene flow and exchange of individuals between populations." It also hopes the data will provide a starting point for evaluating the impact climate change may have on these species.

In its first ten years, the HELS project has recorded nearly 3,500 sightings of these high elevation species. The HELS database made a vital contribution to Christopher Shank's research into the vulnerability of pikas to climate change. As average temperatures rise in the Canadian Rockies over the course of this century, pikas are going to have to migrate higher on mountain slopes in order to find the cooler tempera-

tures they need to survive.

Shank's research concluded somewhat optimistically that, based on the US Fish and Wildlife Service's temperature criterion for pika persistence and two climate emissions scenarios, none of Alberta's pika populations are likely to be threatened by increasing mean summer temperatures for most of this century. However, the study was limited to considering only the impact of emissions on mean temperatures. As Shank noted, his study didn't consider the impact climate change may have on the quality of the habitat pika need to survive.

Conclusion

These are just three examples of citizens getting directly involved in conservation. They exemplify how through our individual actions we can help generate the knowledge and will to better conserve the natural world.▲

American Pika (*Ochotona princeps*)
PHOTO: © D. VONESCH



Hoary Marmot (*Marmota caligata*) PHOTO: © I. URQUHART

A Family Trying to Help Save Humanity

By Joe Vipond, Erin Grier, Sadie Vipond, and Willa Vipond

It's an all-hands on deck kind of moment and the Vipond/Grier family is mobilizing the entire crew. As we see increasing signs of environmental degradation, through species extinction, climate disruption, and the plastics crisis, it's becoming increasingly evident that humanity is a threat, even to itself. Our family is not taking this lying down. We're all engaged, at some level or another, on combatting this degradation. Our backs are to the wall, until we win, and save ourselves and, in turn, save beauty, life, and the planet.

Sound unrealistic? Too ambitious? Not really. We have each picked a small piece of the puzzle (see insets for details of each family member's involvement). By working persistently on each piece, we are confident we will, through a series of small victories, move the needle forward.

Part of the challenge, for many, is the enormity of the problems... and there are so many of them. It can seem so completely overwhelming that some will ask: Where to begin? Or, why even bother starting? The enormity of the challenge is enough to make some curl up in the fetal position and accept fate.

This parable captures the lesson the Vipond/Grier tries to apply: As a family, we've participated in a number of community clean-up efforts from Calgary's Bow River valley to as far away as the Bagmati River running through Nepal's Kathmandu. (Recently, the family was in Nepal, where Joe offered medical education to local emergency trainees). It always seems that the plastic waste and garbage on the ground is horrendous. It's disheartening, hard to believe a

few could clean up these areas. But, in each place, we put our heads down and focused, one piece of plastic at a time, until the land was clean again. What seemed impossible at first glance was accomplished in a matter of hours, with many hands, and persistence.

So we focus on the little objectives, the small victories. We know that many hands, working together, will combine to achieve greater victories. When one victory is achieved, we celebrate, take a day off, and then move on to the next objective.

It's important to realize that we don't equate our work with sacrifice. Although there is duty and responsibility, our work is full of friendship, community, and many laughs. We are exposed to new unique experiences and amazing personalities also working on

changing the world for the better. Some say the purpose of life is to have fun. Some say it is to have meaning. We think it is to have fun while finding meaning.

We immerse ourselves in nature at every opportunity. Whether it is skiing fresh powder in the winter, or multi-day backpacking in the summer, or mountain biking through crisp fallen leaves in the fall, or hunting for dinosaur fossils in the spring, we are always seeking new adventures in our incredible Alberta landscape. We know that all work and no play makes Joe, Erin, Sadie, and Willa dull. We know we only protect and save what we love. So we are always recharging, immersing ourselves in the beauty and bounty of our incredible world.



The Viponds in Haida Gwaii PHOTO: © J. VIPOND

Finally, we try to live our values. When it comes to electricity production and use, our home is carbon neutral thanks to our array of eighteen solar panels and its high efficiency features. We live centrally to downtown, which allows us to walk, bike, use transit, and scooter for the majority of our city travel. We grow our own garden vegetables and buy as much food as possible from our local farmers' markets and organic stores. Our weekly garbage total is as small as we can make it and, on very good weeks, we don't have any trash to take to the curb. Although we don't have an electric car yet, we hope to in the very near future.

While we know the changes we need can't be achieved by the efforts of one family, and what we really need is systemic policy change, we also know we need to walk our talk. As things continue to worsen (it will take a while to turn this ship around), we need to be able to look in the mirror and tell ourselves that we are doing all we can to mitigate our impact on the planet. Importantly, we know that behaviour modelling works. Six solar arrays look skyward on our block now – it wasn't very long ago that there weren't any. Where once there was only one kid in the neighbourhood fighting the plastic war, now there are nine. We hope that green changes and actions expand exponentially, until we have societal change.

Societal change is our ultimate objective because our problems are huge and growing. We know our one family can't win this on our own. But we know we're not alone. We believe there are 7.7 billion intelligent, creative, and caring people on this planet. If we can inspire and engage our fellow citizens, we can work together to achieve greatness. You, dear reader, are one of those that can choose to be a part of the solution. It is time to get involved, and start to organize. Have fun, build community, and laugh. And, at the same time, start changing the world.

Willa's actions:

Hello, my name is Willa and I'm 11 years old. I have been working on reducing single-use plastic use for 18 months. I started when I went to do a highway clean-up and the amount of garbage was so gross. So, I



PHOTO: © J. VIPOND

started to work with Plastic Free YYC and I gave a speech to City Council about it (for more information about Plastic Free YYC visit <https://plasticfreeyyc.com>). A few weeks ago I was interviewed by CBC and was on a panel discussion about what I have done at the zero waste festival. My friends and I have made a club called the Kensington Clean-Up Club (KCC). We are a group of nine young girls who are actively changing things. We have put up a poster at the Mayor's Expo. We made recycled t-shirt bags and other things and sold them at our street sale to raise money for good causes (including AWA!). And we went to our local farmers' market and educated people about climate change, recycling, and composting. I am committed to helping Calgary become more eco-friendly, and you can too!

Sadie's actions:

Hello, my name is Sadie and I'm 13 years old. I was born into a family that noticed the climate crisis and chose to act against it. What our climate used to be is crumbling around us. We have to act fast. Sea levels are rising; polar ice caps are melting. The



PHOTO: © J. VIPOND

risks of floods and wildfire are growing higher every year. Humans contribute a whole lot to the climate crisis. Here's our chance to turn it around. In June 2018 the Climate resiliency plan was presented to Calgary City Council and I made a speech supporting the plan. I bike and take city transit to reduce my carbon emissions. But I wanted to do more. Then Greta Thunberg raised her voice. I made it to every Fridays For Future school strike that I could and listened to her speeches. Greta is a true inspiration. I fight the climate crisis because I want my future to be a good one. I want a home for humanity and for all of the animals that are and will be on the brink of extinction. So help us. Help our future. Just do what you can.



Sadie Vipond addressing Calgary City Council on the climate change issue.

Erin's actions:

Hello, my name is Erin and I'm a social worker and mediator working in Alberta for the past 25 years. As well as support-



PHOTO: © J. VIPOND

ing our budding activists, I have focused my efforts at the neighbourhood and fam-

ily levels. For three years, our local Hillhurst Elementary School partnered with Green Calgary for Giving Day. Each year the students learn about reducing their environmental footprint and that it wasn't always necessary to buy new things from the store. The first year kids traded toys, the second, books, and the third year, kind acts (volunteering at the school, complimenting a friend, etc.) – a most precious gift. After building our own green roof, I've helped to advocate for more policy support in Calgary for further green roofs (for information on green roofs in Calgary see <https://www.calgary.ca/UEP/Water/Pages/Water-sheds-and-rivers/Erosion-and-sediment-control/Green-Roofs.aspx>). As a family, we've transitioned to a more plant-based diet and support actively our local farmers' market and natural food stores. We endeavour to procure second hand, either through borrowing, making, or thrift purchases. I'm able to bike and walk to work. It's satisfying to ensure our family's eco-negative impact is as small as possible and our eco-positive impact is massive!

PS – I would have added a link to a City of Edmonton green roof page but it's not as fulsome as Calgary's.

Joe's actions:

Hello, my name is Joe and I'm an emergency doctor who has worked in Alberta since 2000. I've been concerned about the climate since I can remember, but for a long time I didn't think I had a way to create change. In 2012 I got involved in the Alberta Coal Phase Out campaign and quickly became an organizer and spokesperson. We won that battle in November 2015, securing the government's commitment to eliminate 44 megatonnes of annual GHG emissions. I then became the lead organizer for the Canadian Coal Phase Out campaign. We were victorious in November 2016, eliminating another 22 megatonnes of coal-fired electricity emissions from our future. So in total I've had an impact on nearly 10 percent of Canada's total emissions! More recently, I've focused on the local level. I run the Climate Voices Alberta and Alberta Acts on Climate Change Facebook pages (reaching about 15,000 people per week), co-chair the Calgary Climate Club, and chair the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment Alberta Regional Committee. It's a lot of work, but a lot of fun too, and very satisfying to help change the world. 🌱



PHOTO: © I. URQUHART

Celebrating and Honouring the Stewardship of Water:

The 2019 Keepers of the Water Gathering

By Nissa Petterson, *AWA Conservation Specialist*



In mid-July, I attended the Keepers of the Water gathering in Wabasca, Alberta. My attendance marked AWA's first opportunity to participate in a general assembly for the Keepers of the Water. It was a tremendous experience.

The Keepers of the Water is an organization dedicated to protecting the air, water, wildlife, and land within the Arctic Drainage Basin. While that may seem to be a fairly large and daunting objective to attain, the primary motivation behind this organization remains relatively straightforward: acknowledge the importance of water to all living things, and secure it for generations to come. The foundation and momentum

behind the Keepers of the Water comes from a wide assortment of indigenous communities, non-governmental organizations, environmental groups, concerned citizens, and localized grassroots groups such as the Keepers of the Athabasca or Keepers of the Peace that work year-round to protect watershed regions.

Since 2006, Keepers of the Water have been traveling to communities throughout western Canada to talk about the importance of protecting and maintaining clean water for all communities. This year's gathering was cohosted by the Bigstone Cree First Nation. Local community members from the Bigstone Cree Nation, Wabasca, and other nearby hamlets played a critical role

in this event. They generously welcomed us and shared their time, space, knowledge and experiences with all attendees.

The main theme of the gathering was focused on water and attendees were asked to reflect on the question: *'What does water mean to you?'*

Initially, I thought the answer to this question was easy and fairly universal. Water is vital to life and all populations should have access to it. However, during the gathering I was introduced to a multitude of different perspectives on how we think about water. It's much more than "just" a necessity for life.

The gathering was held at the Lakeview Sports Centre, a relatively new addition to the area's infrastructure. While the hamlet of Wabasca is quite small (Statistics Can-



Wabasca Lake PHOTO: © N. PETTERSON

ada reports its 2016 population as 1,406), it has been built up to accommodate the surge of industrial activity, primarily forestry and petroleum in the region. Large hauling semi-tractor trailers, working trucks with diesel tanks, and logging trucks were as common as mosquitoes in most of the hotel parking lots, with ongoing construction of new facilities near the sports centre adding to the traffic. The basic amenities such as a hospital, drugstore, grocery store, and gas station were also there to support the bustling and transient nature of remote working industries.

Most of the gathering took place in the main gymnasium of the sports centre.

Coffee and a hot breakfast greeted the people who trickled into the gymnasium. I chose a vacant table at the front of the gym with good views of the stage and screen. There I was joined by a family from Calling Lake I had met briefly upon my arrival. Having made the hour trip north to participate in the gathering, they explained to me how they had lived in the area for quite some time and were staying at the Kapaskwatinak Area in their tipi. They viewed the gathering as an opportunity to learn more and to further or build new connections with individuals who were equally concerned about changes in the landscape.

As we joked over breakfast about the relentless mosquitoes we dealt with the night before, we were joined by Dr. Josie C. Auger. Dr. Auger is an assistant professor at the University of Athabasca, a Bigstone Cree member, and was one of the featured presenters for the gathering. Her arrival was welcomed by many attendees, a reaction that conveyed how she was a well-known, active, and respected community member both within the Bigstone Cree First Nation and Wabasca.

As breakfast continued, our conversations touched on a variety of significant community issues: an underfunded local education system that is not conducive to indigenous learners, a general disregard for natural or sacred law in modern society, a resurgence of women and restorative justice, how indigenous communities define crime, and finally, paths towards healing for indigenous

communities. For me, these conversations were opportunities to listen and learn. Some of the concerns shared during these conversations might have surprised people from Alberta's major urban centres. Such surprise would have sprung from the fact that small rural communities are still struggling to resolve water quantity and quality issues solved long ago in major municipalities. The people who live in communities such as Wabasca need empathy and support from their urban cousins as the former try to secure conditions that the latter take for granted.

The first day of the gathering officially began with a welcoming speech from Chief Silas Yellowknee of the Bigstone Cree First Nation. While he used humour in his speech, his message and concerns were sobering: neglect of the landscape needs to stop now. In his speech, Chief Yellowknee emphasized how nature is an integral part of who we all are, and how we cannot dissociate ourselves from the place where we originated. As Chief Yellowknee elaborated on his personal struggles and those of his community's with respect to changes in the local watershed and landscape, he continued to reiterate his commitment to continue to live with and through nature with the phrase: "As long as the Sun shines, the Water flows and the Grass grows."

Hearing that saying reminded me that the promises of the treaties between First Nations and Canada were not kept; the Treaties were an everlasting promise to respect and secure the way of life of Indigenous people. Despite Chief Yellowknee's belief in the importance of that commitment, he told attendees that his community was very concerned their ambition to live with and through nature was threatened.

One of the subsequent presentations that stood out for me was a water sampling report from North Wabasca Lake. The Bigstone Cree First Nation was the catalyst for the report and sought an investigation after locals expressed concerns over changes they observed within the lake. A major concern was that some fish caught in the lake had deformities or lesions. After brief communication with the provincial government,

the band launched a formal collaboration with Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) to study the lake. The study tested a variety of parameters such as lake depth, shoreline perimeter, fish populations and condition, oxygen levels, and surrounding land-uses. Troy Stuart, a representative from the lands department of the Bigstone Cree First Nation, scrolled through the report pages as they were projected onto the screen. While he had been a part of the study from the beginning, he offered little discussion and interpretation of the results (perhaps because AEP hadn't sent a representative). What especially concerned me was that there seemed to be very little impetus or intent for continuing research in the local area, or in considering land-use changes to help reassure the communities of Bigstone Cree and Wabasca that their concerns were being seriously addressed.

Frustration rooted in lack of action also permeated the Water Talking Circle held later in the afternoon. The majority of the tables and chairs in the gymnasium were rearranged to make room for the session which was inspired by a sharing circle, a common practice amongst many indigenous communities. Generally speaking, First Nation sharing circles are an essential part of their oral tradition; most Indigenous communities host sharing circles to transmit cultural knowledge, feelings, or experiences between generations and community members whether they be elders, families, or just friends. Approximately half of the attendees for the gathering stayed to participate in the water talking circle. Participants were encouraged to share thoughts or experiences about water or the landscape more generally. Those who did not want to participate were welcomed to listen. This was my first experience participating in a sharing circle. I was seated next to an Elder who started the conversation by welcoming everyone. He held a beaded sleeve to symbolize a talking stick, and explained that the person holding the sleeve had an opportunity to speak truthfully and courageously from the heart without interruption.

As the sleeve was passed around the circle,

quite profound stories, feelings, and knowledge were shared. I was particularly struck by the thoughts of a woman from the Bigstone Cree First Nation. She expressed her concern for the state of the earth, not just for her family, but for all generations to come: “I am afraid that there is nothing left for them.” Attempting to control her emotions and tears, she explained how the changes she has seen in the local landscape such as unprecedented algae blooms in lakes, fish with deformities, and little to no moose left to harvest has altered the way she lives her life. Conditions on the landscape were no longer enabling water to deliver the lifestyle that she expected.

By the end of the sharing circle, I felt completely overwhelmed by a whirlwind of different emotions. I believe that most people there, like me, were buffeted by feelings of anger, sadness, helplessness, hope, and betrayal. They all competed for our attention.

Participating in the Water Talking Circle was one of the more difficult things I have experienced in my lifetime. Witnessing the intense, raw emotion of people who genuinely fear for their future was overwhelming. What may be distant worries for many of us took on real urgency. The fast pace of resource development in the Wabasca wil-

derness has left the people of Bigstone Cree First Nation and Wabasca feeling as though all they have ever known is being compromised or taken from them unfairly. So much of who they are as a people and a community is tied intimately to the nature that has surrounded them for generations. That nature is changing profoundly.

As I packed my things to leave for the day, I felt guilty that I hadn’t appreciated the level of frustration or fear that so many of the local people at the gathering are living with. They were losing parts of their identity, an experience I haven’t experienced yet and hope never to experience.

Reflecting on my Water Talking Circle experience, I return to thoughts I shared previously with respect to my own lifestyle. In my last *Wild Lands Advocate* article, I wrote about how my fishing and hunting excursions allow me to connect with a version of myself that I identify most strongly with. Alberta’s wilderness is a “channel for delivering more profound moments in my life.” While I may choose this lifestyle and reap the benefits of having this choice, members of the Bigstone Cree First Nation and the Wabasca community were *born* into it. Most importantly, those who want to choose to affirm that heritage feel as though that choice is at

risk because of what is happening to their home. The essence of their existence – their culture and traditions – are at risk of vanishing since it is tied so tightly to the presence of healthy and thriving ecosystems. As the latter are compromised, so too is their essence. Water and food security mean more than maintaining a healthy quality of life; for these communities they are integral means to protecting a way of life.

The second day of the gathering focused on community priorities related to fulfilling natural or sacred law which were reinforced by western science. A series of presentations expanded on pursuing the idea of water and food security in ways allowing indigenous and local communities to continue their ways of life.

Dr. Janelle Baker, an assistant professor from the University of Athabasca, presented first. Through her work in Traditional Land Use studies and the BEAHR program (Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources), Dr. Baker found that not enough emphasis in land-use impact assessments was placed on the quality of bush food for Indigenous communities. This led her to the Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment at McGill University, where she studied the quality of traditional food within the hamlet of Wabasca and the Bigstone Cree First Nation. Dr. Baker’s emphasis on how important her studies on traditional food quality were given the amount of industrial activity taking place on the landscape resonated with me. Her informative studies help to support the Bigstone Cree First Nation in continuing First Nation harvesting traditions and fostering their vital connection with nature.

Dr. Shauna Reckseidler-Zenteno and Dr. Tarah Kynch briefly presented on the research they are about to undertake – research on microbial communities in northern Alberta waters. They plan to investigate the impact human developments on surrounding landscapes may have on the composition of microscopic communities. Their findings could be critical to water security issues within the Bigstone Cree First Nation and other Indigenous communities.



Seamless...this portrayal of water suggests well how interconnected water is to so many aspects of living well. PHOTO: © R. RASMUSSEN

Dr. Susan Kutz, a professor in Ecosystem and Public Health from the University of Calgary is also building working relationships with indigenous communities. She described how her research team has studied the population health of moose and caribou in the Northwest Territories. What I found extremely interesting during Dr. Kutz's presentation was the effort put into encouraging and enabling First Nations, and other communities, to contribute important information towards the project by developing hunter sampling kits and an educational DVD.

Dr. Josie Auger offered the morning's final presentation. There she focused on the self-determination and sovereignty of Indigenous women, a topic she has studied for many years. Dr. Auger's current research is compelled by the striking similarities she sees between Canada's First Nations and other Indigenous communities across the world. A series of trips through Central Asia and France helped her further develop the idea of how Indigenous people struggle to maintain identity and culture through oppression. Dr. Auger focuses on how Indigenous women, by reclaiming sovereignty over their bodies and spirituality, will strengthen their self-determination. She believes such strengthening is integral to restoring balance and peace within cultures that generally have suffered at the hands of

colonial societies.

Dr. Auger further elaborated that cultural oppression creates and perpetuates a disconnection between Indigenous communities and nature. It does this by preventing them from fulfilling sacred law and traditional understandings of their destiny. Using Indigenous women as an example, Dr. Auger sees women as the keepers of water not only because people are essentially made of water, but because water is such a huge component of the life-giving process that is a part of the feminine entity when considering the womb and placenta. There is an intimate connection between women and water, as both are vessels for life, and essential to the growth and survival of man. Water is the life blood borne by Mother Earth and kept by women.

By participating in the Keepers of the Water gathering, I learned much about how a disconnection from nature changes how we value it. How we use the land alters the importance of the values we have for nature. Some may be privileged while others may be diminished. While some people value Alberta's wilderness for its beauty, recreational, or industrial opportunities, others regard it as a direct means to their survival both in terms of sustenance and self-determination.

By advocating for water security throughout the province of Alberta, and supporting organizations like Keepers of the Water, Albertans can help to empower those who

wish to maintain their vital connection to nature, sustain themselves from the land, and practice their culture and traditions.

Collaborative efforts that secure the lifestyle of Indigenous communities for generations to come benefit all: we all need clean water and the life it provides. Many Indigenous beliefs and practices are based on information collected over centuries. Those beliefs align with conservation initiatives that nurture and foster biodiversity and thriving ecosystems. Elements such as sustainable harvesting based on ecological capacity would serve to help our societies pull away from industrial scale practices with respect to logging, resource extraction, and agriculture. It would encourage communities to develop while reducing their environmental footprint. It may foster a greater appreciation for how Alberta's wilderness sustains us.

Back to the question we were asked to consider as the gathering began. Through my experience in Wabasca I would say that water is so much more than what you drink, or where you play, or what you use it for. It is a natural force that connects all living things; therefore, it should be respected deeply as its purity and quantity are fragile. It is clearer to me now that water is more than a basic necessity; it is also a force that allows us to live the life we choose. ▲

Featured Artist Lisa Brawn

Snowy Owl (2018)
painted woodcut
11" x 7"



Alberta's Wetland Policy in the White Area:

Shortcomings and Future Directions

By Taylor Bujaczek, *Aquality Environmental Consulting*



Wetlands are Alberta's most complex and diverse ecosystems, covering approximately 20 percent of Alberta's landscape. Wetlands are valued for serving essential ecological and societal functions that include maintaining water supply and supporting native biota. However, wetlands had historically been viewed as a hindrance to Alberta's settled areas in development, industry, and infrastructure. As a result, drastic wetland losses have occurred in Alberta due to this general lack of awareness regarding the aforementioned environmental benefits wetlands offer.

Society's attitude has shifted with new scientific knowledge, and federal/provincial funds and programs have helped to ensure land improvements for wetlands. With new awareness in Alberta came a new provincial wetland policy in 2013 (Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development) aimed at balancing resource development with wetland preservation. However, several criticisms of the new policy have been raised due to challenges in management of wetland improvements in Alberta's settled areas (known as the White Area). Understanding wetland significance and exposing the gaps in the wetland policy is therefore essential to avoid short-sighted land-use decisions in Alberta's White Area.

Wetland Value and Loss in the White Area

Mineral wetlands (marshes, swamps, and shallow open water) are the primary category of wetlands that are currently present in Alberta's White Area. The White Area

covers 39 percent of Alberta's southern landscape and constitutes privately owned land for settlement and agriculture. Most of Alberta's White Area is situated in the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) where centuries of glacial retreat and scouring left millions of isolated "potholes" (now inhabited by shallow open water wetlands).

Mineral wetlands in the PPR serve a variety of ecosystem services including removal of excessive nutrients from agricultural practices, water treatment cost reduction, water storage during high precipitation, and gradual water supply to other habitats downstream. Wetlands also provide nesting grounds for nearly eight million waterfowl and 20 million shorebirds while concurrently hosting spawning areas for fish and sustaining more than 20 rare plant species. PPR wetlands can be utilized for humanitarian purposes such as recreation, education, and cultural significance to many Indigenous groups. And from an economic perspective, every dollar spent on wetland retention yields about \$7.70 in wetland ecosystem services, such as flood control.

If wetlands are lost or disturbed, they can experience altered hydrology, increased nutrient and pollution runoff, increased risk of introduced species, and enhanced habitat fragmentation. Thus, while it may seem lucrative to impact a wetland for short-term benefits, there are incentives to preserve wetlands to achieve long-term benefits.

Due to wetland destruction throughout the 20th century, nearly 64 percent of wetlands in Alberta's settled areas no longer exist. In the White Area specifically, rapid urban sprawl is one cause of wetland de-

struction. This rapid expansion has created wetland losses as high as 90 percent in Calgary and 80 percent in Edmonton. Agricultural practices such as tilling, draining, and ploughing were all practices intended to expand the productive agricultural land base. But, as Locky showed in a 2011 study, these activities on private lands have resulted in nearly 40 to 60 percent wetland loss and ecosystem damage. A wetland policy that carries authority and reaches different sectors within Alberta is therefore fundamental to prevent further wetland loss in settled areas and preserve wetland value.

Alberta's Wetland Policy

The long-awaited release of the "Alberta Wetland Policy" occurred in 2013 and succeeded the Interim Policy "Wetland Management in the Settled Area of Alberta" released in 1993. The policy came into full effect in the White Area on June 1, 2015 and on July 4, 2016 in the Green Area. The policy was developed to complement Alberta's water sustainability strategy "Water for Life." That strategy aims to create a "healthy and sustainable water supply for the environment, for our communities, and for our economic well-being."

The policy is aimed at conserving and restoring wetlands in areas that have experienced high losses while still allowing for growth and development. It manages wetlands by avoiding, minimizing, and (if required), replacing lost wetland value. Wetlands are evaluated and assigned a relative wetland value (Figure 2), where highly valued wetlands are prioritized for preservation. But the success of this poli-

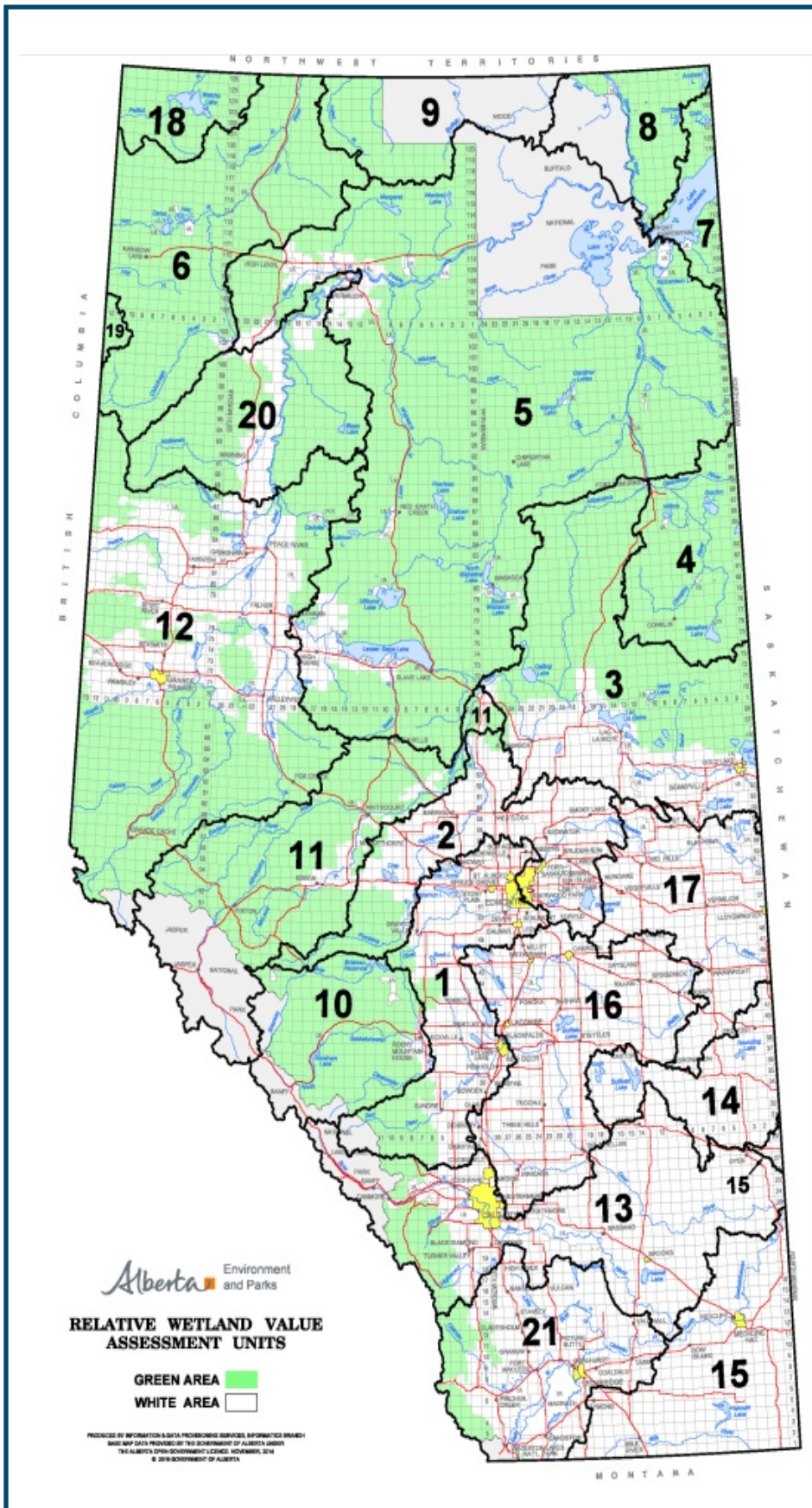


Figure 1: Relative Wetland Value Assessment Units (RWVAU) among Alberta's White and Green Area. Areas of high historical wetland losses include RWVAUs 13, 14, 15, 20 (White Area) and 21. CREDIT: GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

cy will, however, be highly dependent on proper implementation and any loopholes presented.

Is Avoidance Working?

One major criticism of the policy is that it fails in its responsibility to encourage proponents to avoid impacts on wetlands, where managing development seems to be a higher priority than wetland protection. The current policy seems to leave few barriers to obstruct development on wetlands. A proponent needs to provide evidence for how they have attempted to avoid and minimize the loss of wetland area and value. If this evidence is provided, this leaves little obstructions for a *Water Act* approval to be denied. Creating financially impractical wetland replacement fees is an approach that has been undertaken by the City of Calgary through private compensation banking. However, many developers were unimpeded and paid the high fees for actual land values at \$450,000/ha. By comparison, the current policy has wetland replacement fees at upwards of \$19,400/ha for Class D wetlands in the White Area. Creating more awareness around wetland importance and value needs to be spread throughout government, industries, and communities to empower local action for wetland avoidance in a province that has encountered so much loss.

Despite this, it is difficult to say that avoidance isn't working in Alberta's White Area because there is no requirement for proponents or regulators to report on avoidance measures. Companies make internal decisions regularly around avoidance, and this inability to quantify avoidance and mitigation steps is damaging to policy success. If the policy doesn't have a framework to document wetland avoidance, it's difficult to determine whether wetland avoidance is successful. Having stronger avoidance mechanisms and a framework to document avoidance is imperative for evaluating if the "Alberta Wetland Policy" is fulfilling its goals.

Looking Back on Wetland Compensation

One replacement method that has struggled to succeed in the White Area is the concept of compensation banking. In 2004, The City of Calgary became a wetland restoration agent in Alberta and applied this method to discourage approval holders from disturbing wetlands. Compensation and restoration was to be a last resort if avoidance and minimization weren't feasible. Funds paid into the program were supposed to be allocated towards restoring wetlands in Calgary's watersheds.

The Auditor General reported in 2015 that nearly \$25 million was collected from proponents but no wetlands were ever put back on the landscape. A final report released in 2019 (Fiera Biological Consulting) revealed that there were few opportunities for wetland restoration in the municipal area, due to a basin closure order for the Bow, Oldman, and South Saskatchewan River basins in 2006. This prevented The City of Calgary from obtaining water licences necessary for restoration work since most of their projects relied on municipal treated stormwater. Complications were faced when The City of Calgary attempted to perform restoration work outside the city limits, and both of these challenges led to a gradual accumulation of compensation funds. This emphasizes the need for stronger avoidance mechanisms especially in the current policy where the wetland replacement fees are much lower. The experiences from the City of Calgary also reinforce that adequate capability and resources, and geographic flexibility in accessing restoration opportunities needs to be implemented within the "Alberta Wetland Policy" to achieve its primary outcomes.

Centralizing Replacement Funds

The "Alberta Wetland Policy" may potentially be at a stage where more resources and geographic flexibility is available for wetland restorations. When the activities of an approval holder produce a permanent wetland loss, one of the provincial govern-

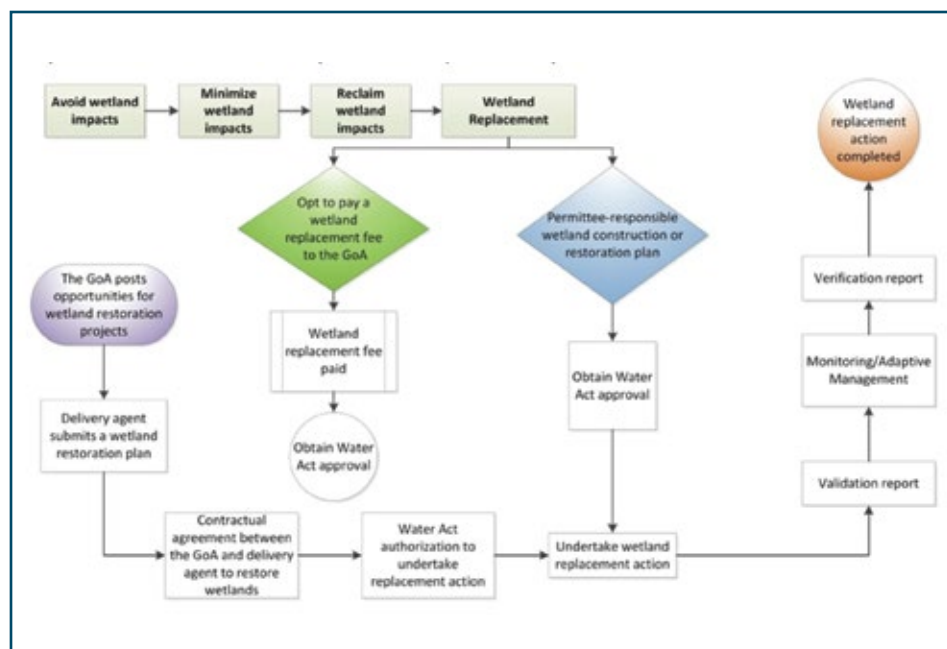


Figure 2: An overview of wetland replacement options available under the December 1, 2018 update to the "Alberta Wetland Policy." Note: "wetland restoration agent" status and responsibilities are equivalent to a "delivery agent" described in this figure. CREDIT: GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

ment's wetland replacement options calls for the holder to pay a wetland replacement fee. Prior to December 1, 2018, fees were paid directly to a third party wetland restoration agent who would carry out the wetland restoration work and provide annual reports to the province.

As of December 1, 2018, replacement fees payments are shifted back to the province. Now the provincial government forms contractual agreements between wetland restoration agents like Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) to continue carrying out wetland restorations (Figure 2). This policy update has many advantages; it provides guidance for the restoration agents and allows the province to monitor wetland restorations after their completion.

The update also allows the opportunity for more restoration work to be contracted by the province to combat a legacy of wetland loss. This could create restoration agents that are specialized to attain specific restoration goals in different business sectors, where currently there is only one registered wetland restoration agent in Alberta. For this positive step to occur there needs to be a clearly defined qualification and certification process for wetland restoration agents.

But, the experiences from The City of Calgary as a wetland restoration agent must be considered when moving forward with this initiative. A report was released by Fiera Biological Consulting in 2019 that reviewed The City of Calgary and The County of Vermilion River's experiences in municipal-provincial wetland management. This report claimed that clear expectations, proper communication, capacity and resources, and regulatory harmony are paramount to ensuring that municipalities succeed as wetland restoration agents under the "Alberta Wetland Policy". Recognizing this shortfall in wetland replacement is a reason for some optimism but only time will tell if the new update will fulfill all its proposed benefits.

The Policy Needs to Advocate for Alberta's Producers

Another area of improvement necessary for the wetland policy is for the government to create a straightforward means for Alberta's producers/landowners to improve their wetland stewardship. One of the issues identified in a 2017 Alberta NAWMP Partnership report was a general lack of awareness and clarity about the wetland

policy among Alberta's producers. Confusion arises among landowners about what differentiates a wetland from a "low spot" and what kind of activities on their land is governed by wetland legislation. Education provided by the provincial government aimed towards producers (e.g. fact sheets, bringing in policy speakers) and improving communication between landowners and the province are good starting points. This is vital since the wetland policy in the White Area will not accomplish its goals without positive contributions from Alberta's producers/landowners. The government must help to improve public awareness.

Alberta also needs to better acquaint landowners with the benefits of retaining and restoring wetlands and increase financial support programs. Promoting financial programs for landowners to undertake wetland restorations would incentivize landowners. Organizations such as DUC have several programs that financially compensate landowners for voluntary wetland restoration. Alternative Land-Use Services (ALUS) is a non-profit organization that also provides financial compensation for landowners for wetland retention and restoration (ALUS 2019). As all replacement fees are now channeled directly to the provincial government, more funds may be available to complete these projects and



Agriculture has contributed to wetland historical loss throughout Alberta's White Area.
PHOTO: © J. WHITE

thereby allowing for producers to continue to be stewards of their land.

Conclusion

Creating more awareness for wetland avoidance, having adequate capacity and resources for wetland replacement, and creating more awareness about the "Alberta Wetland Policy" among producers can improve wetland management. Although there has been some reformation for centralizing wetland replacement funds, the wetland restoration program is still developing. Until this is completed, the knowl-

edge of what we have lost in the White Area hangs over our heads and emphasizes the value of what needs to be preserved. ▲

Acknowledgements

Special recognition is owed to Jay White for his guidance on Alberta's wetland policy in the White Area and support in writing this piece. I'd also like to acknowledge Ducks Unlimited Canada for their contributions to this article.

Featured Artist Lisa Brawn

Raven (2019)
painted woodcut block
11" x 11"



Redpoll (2019)
painted woodcut block
7.5" x 9"



Canada's Environmental Law:

Promises Made versus Promises Kept

By Joanna Skrajny, *AWA Conservation Specialist*



Opinions about Bill C-69, Ottawa's wide-ranging law amending the federal environmental protection regime, were as plentiful as showers in Calgary this summer. Premier Kenney dubbed it the "No More Pipelines Bill"; B.C. Senator Richard Neufeld predicted that "it will have disastrous consequences on our country"; Ecojustice lawyer Joshua Ginsberg stated that the bill is "not perfect, but it strikes a balance by making sure important environmental issues like climate change, Indigenous rights, and sustainable economic development are all factored into future assessment."

So now that Bill C-69 is part of the legislative landscape what will happen? Will it be the fourth horseman, a harbinger of the apocalypse? Hardly. If anything, Bill C-69 is more like putting lipstick on the proverbial creature created by the Harper Government's drastic slashes to environmental protections in 2012. Spin and outrage aside, it doesn't deliver a significant strengthening of federal environmental review processes. Canadians should be outraged that Bill C-69 failed to amend our laws enough to help give environmental integrity and values more prominence.

So what gives? What happened to the process, and *what* is Bill C-69, really?

Our answer begins in the summer of 2016, when it was hard not to feel hopeful about the future of Canada's environmental laws. Environment and Climate Change Canada Minister McKenna received a mandate from Prime Minister Trudeau to "review Canada's environmental assessment

process to regain public trust and help get resources to market and introduce new, fair processes that will restore robust oversight and thorough environmental assessments of areas under federal jurisdiction." This directive was reinforced by a commitment to "ensure that decisions are based on science, facts, and evidence, and serve the public's interest" and "provide ways for Canadians to express their views and opportunities for experts to meaningfully participate."

The Expert Panel

In August 2016, the Minister established an Expert Panel tasked with recommending how the federal government could go about improving environmental assessment. That fall and winter, the Panel travelled across Canada, visiting 21 cities and hearing over 400 in-person presentations. I attended one of the Calgary sessions, providing the Panel with AWA's perspective on the importance of properly incorporating cumulative effects into Canada's environmental assessments. The list of presenters that day included myself, representatives from Enbridge, Canadian Pacific Railway, the In-Situ Oil Sands Alliance, and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

What I heard that day concurs with the Expert Panel's summary of the public sessions held in Calgary:

- Canadians do not feel connected to environmental assessment decisions anymore. Both Canadians and investors need to feel confident in a process that is fair and transparent.
- An environmental assessment should be an objective, rigorous, and scientific

process that looks at the positive and negative effects of a project, and is free from political interference.

- When done properly, public participation results in better planning, projects and outcomes.

These examples show that there was a great deal of synchronicity in suggested improvements to the environmental assessment process that would provide assurance to both industry and the greater public. For example, Canadian Pacific recommended including strategic assessments to consult on the potential benefits and impacts of new government policies as well as regional assessments to address the cumulative effects of multiple projects on a landscape. These recommendations very closely mirrored the suggestions I made during my presentation. This symmetry goes to show that changes to the environmental assessment system can be mutually beneficial for all stakeholders: while conservationists support the government in taking responsibility for the impacts of the many projects on our working landscapes, industrial players also support the attention to cumulative effects because it provides their sectors with guidance and certainty about how their projects fit into the bigger picture.

Of course, that's not to say there were no protests to shifting the scales in favour of the environment. Some of the presentations favoured leaving things the way they were, or leaving assessments in the hands of provinces. Rob Sturgess of Matrix Solutions argued in favour of provincial assessments: "Today, when the Federal and Provincial EA [environmental assessment] processes try



Despite having a smaller overall footprint than open pit mines, in situ “in its original place” oil sands projects, such as the one pictured here, can have a number of associated impacts on the environment. This includes habitat fragmentation from the entire associated infrastructure, such as transmission lines, seismic lines, pipelines and roads. This can impact watershed capacity and function, as well as species that depend on intact habitat such as boreal caribou. PHOTOS: © C. CAMPBELL

to proceed in parallel, information needs and timing differences usually results in a 6 to 12 month overall project delay. (sic) As an example, the Alberta process takes a 3 to 4 page submission from which an EA is made. The same project, through CEA [the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency], takes considerable more technical information, typically 100-200 pages of submission for the Federal determination if an EA is required.” While the speaker used this as an example to showcase what was, in his opinion, an undue burden to project approval, to me it was a chilling example of how lackadaisical our provincial environmental assessment standards are.

However, presentations favouring the status quo seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. This was reinforced by the questions the Expert Panel asked afterwards. After one presentation by an industry representative who favoured keeping the environmental assessment process as it was, the Panel stated that they had heard all across the country that the current environmental assessment process had lost the public’s trust and required major improvements – so what was the industry official willing to change? I no longer remember the representative’s uncertain reply, other than that the official completely dismissed any concerns about the environmental process.

I would be remiss not to mention the main points raised by the Canadian Asso-

ciation of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), an organization that later became one of the main opponents to the new *Impact Assessment Act*. CAPP supported the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge and participation, advocated for the continued use of a project list and legislated time limits, and supported the inclusion of Regional Environmental Assessments. CAPP also advocated for the exemption of in situ oil sands projects from undergoing assessments (as was the case under CEEA 2012) and reiterated its belief that provinces should have exclusive decision making authority for resource development projects.

And so, after hundreds of individual presentations and approximately 2,500 written submissions, the Expert Panel reconvened to produce a report with recommendations on how to improve the environmental assessment process.

In a 2017 WLA article, I provided an in-depth review of the Expert Panel’s recommendations. Here are some of its highlights:

- Major changes are needed to restore public trust in the current federal assessment process
- Jurisdictions (i.e. municipal, provincial and federal governments, as well as Indigenous Groups) should co-operate together to undertake a singular assessment.
- There should be a list of projects which

automatically require federal assessments. This would be supplemented with a provision that any projects which have the potential to impact current and future generations require an impact assessment. As well, any person or group can also request that an assessment be completed.

- To meet the needs of current and future generations, federal assessments should provide assurance that approved projects, plans and policies contribute a net benefit to environmental, social, economic, health and cultural well-being.
- Strategic and regional assessments should be used to determine the impacts of policies and to guide the development of multiple projects on a landscape.
- Assessment information should be permanently and publicly available, scientific data should be publicly available on a federal government database, decisions should be evidence based and any criteria used for decision making should be clearly listed.

Accompanying the Expert Panel’s report was a public consultation period, inviting the public to share their views on the recommendations.

Bill C-69

Only two months after the Expert Panel’s report, the federal government released its

own discussion paper. Frankly this discussion paper cherry picked the aspects of the Expert Panel's recommendations it would adopt and ignored, without any justification, other recommendations. The result was: the public was forced to look at and assess a whole new set of proposals from scratch, with no clear indication of how or whether their initial participation was acknowledged. To top it all off, the proposals were so vague it was difficult to discern exactly what the final legislation would look like. Personally, I was beginning to feel exhausted by the whole process and wondered whether my earlier efforts to engage with the Panel had been worth the time and energy.

Then came the draft Bill C-69, introducing the proposed details of the new *Impact Assessment Act*, in February 2018. On the face of it, this bill definitely attempted to restore the most damaged or suspect parts of the current environmental assessment regime (CEAA 2012). But, the bill also didn't address many troubling aspects of the current process.

For instance, the purpose of CEAA 2012 was to determine whether a given project would cause "significant adverse environmental effects" (read: irreparable damage). Even in those instances, the Governor in Council (the federal cabinet) had the discretion to determine whether those adverse effects were "justified in the circumstances." Given the need to show irreparable damage it's no surprise then that, as highlighted in a Canada West Foundation review, 95 percent of projects that underwent a federal environmental assessment under the CEAA 2012 framework were approved. Even for those projects where it was determined that there would be significant and adverse effects, 73 percent of those projects were approved. So, in short, the circumstances almost always justified any anticipated harm to the environment.

Bill C-69 outlines a new purpose. This is that an impacts assessment should determine whether a project contributes to sustainability (impacts on the environment, economy, society, health and on cur-

rent and future generations) and whether it is in the "public interest." In deciding whether a project is in the public interest the government must consider whether the project will contribute to sustainability, how adverse the project impacts will be, what mitigation measures will be used to address these impacts, the impact of the project on Indigenous peoples, and what impact the project will have on Canada's ability to meet its climate targets. Martin Olszynski, an associate professor with the University of Calgary, noted a major flaw to this approach: the new Act "like all of its predecessors, does not draw an environmental – or any other – line in the sand. It merely requires the government to *identify and consider* impacts in a transparent manner. Accordingly, Minister McKenna was on solid legal ground when she said that the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion could have been approved under the proposed regime. Any project could, subject only to our politicians' assessment as to where the public interest – and vote – lies. This has long been the bargain reflected in such laws and accepted by industry, which for the most part it has served very well."

Under CEAA 2012, stricter criteria were introduced to govern the public's ability to participate in assessments and to provide comments. Only members of the public who were considered to be "directly affected" or who have "relevant information or expertise" were able to participate in Review Panel hearings or assessments of pipelines being considered by the National Energy Board - which are usually the biggest and most contentious projects. This tightening excluded large portions of the public from participating in major project assessments that arguably impact the Canadian public-at-large. Under the 2012 regime it was more difficult to participate based on concerns extending beyond a project footprint, such as a project's contribution to climate change. Bill C-69 removed this limitation to public participation – definitely a step in the right direction. However, much more needs to be done before public trust in the process is restored. The public needs to feel as though

their input matters to the outcome of the project. They need to be provided with simple, easy to understand documents that clearly outline the issues at hand, instead of binders brimming with consultant jargon. In other words, they need to be provided with the resources and the time to feel heard, and to believe their opinion is valued. The new *Impact Assessment Act* does not provide these opportunities.

CEAA 2012 instituted new, shorter, deadlines to complete different types of environmental assessment work. A final environmental assessment decision was expected to be reached no later than one year after the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency began an assessment. If a matter was referred to a review panel it was expected that a final environmental assessment decision would be made in no more than two years. The rationale for these deadlines was simple: speed up project approvals. It also should be noted that these clocks could be stopped, and the timeline for completing an assessment therefore could be extended, while information requests were being addressed.

The new *Impact Assessment Act* shortens these timelines for completing assessments even further, to 300 days for a general review and 600 for projects subject to a review panel. This shortened timeline is coupled with a new 180 day "early planning stage", which is intended to provide early opportunities for public input and consultation with Indigenous governments. A concerning aspect to these shortened timelines is a new change wherein the time taken by proponents to respond to a review panel's request will no longer result in a pause to the assessment deadline (as was previously the case). Any "stopping of the clock" would have to be done by the Environment Minister. This substantially shortens the timelines for panel reviews. Tight timelines have been widely criticized for limiting public participation in the assessment process as the public is given insufficient time to review hundreds of pages of technical documents, or hearings are cut short. Many environmental legal

experts, including the Expert Panel itself, have pointed out that these mandatory deadlines also have not worked to shorten the amount of time assessments take. Instead, for both the benefit of the public and industry, estimated timelines to complete project reviews should be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

One of the biggest changes in CEAA 2012 was the introduction of a “project list”, where only certain types of projects were subject to assessment. Political considerations certainly affected the content of this list: projects such as in-situ oil sands projects – which are expected to constitute the majority of future oil sands exploitation – were exempted from environmental assessments entirely. Disappointingly, the *Impact Assessment Act* will still only assess a hand-picked list of projects within a designated list. Now in situ projects *may* be assessed. Whether or not an in situ project would be subject to an environmental assessment depends on whether the province hosting the project has a legislated limit on total oil sands emissions. If such provincial legislation exists, the in situ project would be exempt from a federal environmental assessment. In the absence of such legislation a federal assessment would be required. This treats in situ projects very generously since the provincial emissions limit, as was the case for the Notley government’s, could be dramatically higher in the future than it was in 2015. While the use of a project list is intended to provide clarity to proponents, this may result in some unintended omissions and invites politicization. Consultation on the proposed project list was not released until 2019, which raised fears from both the industry sector and conservationists about what was (or wasn’t) going to be assessed.

Even though it is an improvement over CEAA 2012, the new *Impact Assessment Act* is also over reliant on ministerial discretion. This issue was raised by MPs, industry executives, and environmental NGOs alike as it leaves too much open to political whims. All proponents that participate in the impact assessment process want an objective,



Compelling evidence of the need to conduct environmental assessments of in situ oil sands projects was provided in the spring of 2013. Then, at a blowout at Canadian Natural Resources Limited’s Primrose oil sands operations, 1.6 million litres of bitumen bubbled to the surface. This photo shows approximately 100 litres of bitumen that CNRL allowed to accumulate over a two-week period.

PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL

science-based decision making process.

The new *Impact Assessment Act* promised to restore public trust; it promised to include science more; it promised to establish meaningful public participation. Yet it’s clear that, as written, the Act failed to deliver on these key promises. Overall, the biggest problem is that the *Impact Assessment Act* follows the CEAA 2012 too closely. The 2012 changes were included and passed as part of the *Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity Act* – without any serious public consultation. At what point should we balk at working with legislation we had little to no say about in the first place?

These criticisms and more were raised when Bill C-69 was initially debated in the House of Commons, most staunchly by Green Party Leader Elizabeth May and NDP Member of Parliament Linda Duncan. Over 150 amendments were made before Bill C-69 passed in the House of Commons in June of 2018.

Then came the Senate Review. Things really started to go off the rails in the Chamber of Sober Second Thought.

Opponents to the bill descended on the Senate, publicly decrying that the end was nigh:

- “There will be no new development in the oilsands. Many would argue that’s the very intent of the legislation,” – Doug Black, Alberta Senator February 2019
- “Bill C-69 – as it is drafted – will have serious impacts on the Canadian economy and, specifically, on investment in Alberta.” – Environment Minister Shannon Phillips, October 2019 News Release
- “This bill is as damaging to the Canadian economy as any piece of legislation that we’ve seen in a decade,” Tim McMillan, president and CEO of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers November 2018

Even a cursory overview of the new Bill shows that these arguments hold no water. This was also the assessment legal experts offered after their analyses of the legislation. A March 2019 submission by the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) to the Senate Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources stated:

“CELA is dismayed by the extensive misinformation that some Bill C-69 opponents have conveyed about the IAA [Impact Assessment Act] after the legislation was referred to the Senate. In fact,

some of these anti-IAA comments are so erroneous that CELA questions whether these commentators have actually read or properly understood the Act.”

I share CELA's sentiment. I also was glad to see that not all industry associations viewed Bill C-69 as the harbinger of the apocalypse. The Canadian Mining Association, for example, pointed to areas of the established environmental assessment process that worked and other areas that needed improvement. They recognized the need to strengthen the environmental review process and were supporters of the bill. As they also propose about 50 per cent of projects that get assessed, their view suggests that the true nature of this bill wasn't nearly as threatening as opponents suggested.

As a result of these misleading claims, the Alberta public was riled up, horrified at the idea that their jobs may be lost. There was outrage, protests, and a truck convoy to Ottawa.

And there was lobbying, lots of it. Sharon J. Riley and Sarah Cox of *The Narwhal* showed that “industry and related groups, primarily from the oil and gas industry, are responsible for more than 80 per cent of Senate lobbying on Bill C-69, Canada's proposed new environmental assessment law. In contrast, just 13 per cent of Senate and Senate staff lobbying was conducted by environmental groups and four per cent was carried out by one First Nation.”

So what did opposed groups suggest as improvements to the bill?

The Alberta Government asked to exempt in-situ oil sands projects and intra-provincial pipelines from federal assessment, to exclude downstream climate emission as grounds for rejecting a project, and to release the complete project list before passing the legislation.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' (CAPP) main recommendations included explicit provisions to prevent any member of the public from challenging decisions made during the Impact Assessment process. They recommended

limiting public participation, stating that opening it up would mean “funded activists living in New York City will have the ability to drown out the voices of Canadians living next door to development.” CAPP also petitioned for a number of factors to be optional instead of mandatory, such as including Indigenous knowledge and considering impacts to Indigenous peoples. CAPP abandoned much of their 2016 presentation to the Expert Panel, where they declared their support for Indigenous knowledge and participation.

In the end, the Senate adopted many of these groups' recommendations as part of its 187 amendments to the bill. In some instances, the Senate Committee copied CAPP's suggestions word-for-word. A particularly egregious example was an addition to the purpose of the Act, which was “to improve investor confidence, strengthen the Canadian economy, encourage prosperity and improve the competitiveness of the Canadian energy and resource sectors.”

As former Alberta MLA Kevin Taft commented on the Senate amendments in an interview with *The Narwhal*: “Those should be ringing loud alarm bells for every Canadian. When we have a rich, powerful, foreign-controlled industry drafting our legislation for us we have a real problem with democracy in Canada.”

In the end, the House of Commons accepted almost 100 of the Senate's recommended amendments but rejected some of the most damaging provisions recommended by the Senate (such as the including energy sector competitiveness in the purpose). The Senate accepted the Commons' revised version of Bill C-69, passing it on June 20.

However, the damage – in terms of public awareness – has been done. Too many allege that this bill, even in its current state, will destroy Canada's future. Premier Jason Kenney promised to challenge “pipeline killer” Bill C-69 in the courts. In reality, the new *Impact Assessment Act* is far less dangerous to industry. The law partially restores some protections to better include the public and Indigenous peoples in the

assessment process, and requires environmental assessment decisions to consider the impacts of projects on climate change and society as a whole.

It also undid some of the few remaining environmental protections that were left. The new Project List, published quietly in August this year, once again opens the door to exempting in-situ oil sand projects from needing an assessment. The list also exempts fracking and geothermal projects. The thresholds have also been substantially weakened. Previously, any coal mines that produced over 3,000 tonnes a day were subject to assessment; in the new list, it is 5,000 tonnes. That's allowing mines that are 60 percent bigger to fly under the radar. These regulations are in many ways the teeth of the Impact Assessment Act, and I couldn't be more disappointed by them.

Misinformation and propaganda on the parts of opponents hoping to gain more economic advantages damages society. I'm disappointed in the role the media played in cultivating the vitriol flung at Bill C-69. The mainstream media's failure to fact check and question some of the opponents' assertions harms public discourse. The average Canadian doesn't have the time to read through every single proposal and the media needs to do a better job at recognizing when public fears are being preyed upon and stoked with misinformation.

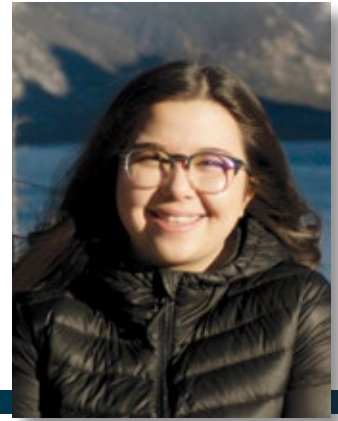
Now it's your turn. Take a minute, read Bill C-69 for yourself. Talk to your friends and neighbours. Support credible news sources that provided appropriate coverage of Bill C-69: *The National Observer*, *The Narwhal*, and independent analyses from *The Globe and Mail* all come to mind. They offered important counterweights to the fear mongering promoted by other media.

Have no doubt that Bill C-69 will be an election issue. It's your responsibility to ensure that as many people as possible are informed about it. 🐳

Canada's biodiversity report card:

Progress made towards the Aichi Targets, 2015-2019

By Grace Wark, AWA Conservation Specialist



Public awareness of environmental issues has changed and evolved over time. In the early 1960s, Rachel Carson may have christened the modern environmental movement with her book *Silent Spring*. There she detailed the devastating environmental effects of pesticide use. Dozens of international environmental agreements were signed over the next few decades. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (1971), the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (1973), the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), and the Montréal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987) are just a few of those efforts. Then, in the early 1990s, climate change grabbed international attention during the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) is now more than 27 years old. Some of these agreements have obtained impressive results. The Montréal Protocol stands out in this respect. Others, such as the Convention on Climate Change, are very disappointing. As the Climate Action Network reminded the leaders of the G7 nations in August, their existing policies aren't doing nearly enough to realize the temperature increase targets set in Paris in 2015.

Amidst this growing international environmental attention, the global collapse of biodiversity has largely gone unnoticed. It has only recently started to gain recognition as a nascent global environmental disaster. Intimately linked, biodiversity loss and

climate change have moved into the spotlight of global policy discussions and media. Demands are increasing on the world's governments to stifle widespread wildlife population loss, degradation of ecosystems and, the impacts of ecosystem degradation on human populations.

Global biodiversity declines are far reaching. They currently impact countless species across all of the world's major biomes. A massive intergovernmental report, assessing over 15,000 scientific and government sources, found there are at least one million species currently threatened with extinction across the globe (IPBES, 2019). Unlike previous mass extinction events, today's is primarily due to human causes. Threats of extinction are echoed in Canada, where WWF Canada's *Living Planet Report* (2017) found that half of Canada's vertebrate species, assessed between 1970 and 2014, are in decline; for species in decline, their populations have decreased by a staggering average of 83 percent.

Global action has taken the form of intergovernmental panels and summits. In turn they have proposed actions and reduction targets deemed palatable to government leaderships and the economies they support. Coming out of the 2010 United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, these are the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Canada committed to meeting the Aichi Targets, agreed upon at the 2010 Convention on Biological Diversity held in Aichi, Japan. However, it wasn't until 2015 that Canada took action on the targets by setting the 2020 *Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada*. Then, in 2016 the federal gov-

ernment announced *Pathway to Canada Target 1*, Canada's action plan for achieving Aichi Target 11.

Canada Target 1: "By 2020, at least 17% of terrestrial areas and inland water, and 10% of marine and coastal areas of Canada are conserved through networks of protected areas and other effective area-based measures."

With 2020 on the horizon, it's an excellent time to look back at Canada's record. How much has Canada achieved for biodiversity and landscape conservation since Target 1 was set in 2015? How much of Canada's land base is currently protected? How does Canada plan to achieve 17 percent protection? Is 17 percent really sufficient to protect Canadian biodiversity?

The Aichi Biodiversity Targets consist of five strategic goals and 20 targets to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, reduce biodiversity pressures and promote sustainable land use, safeguard ecosystems, and enhance the benefits from ecosystem services. Set in 2010, the deadline for the Aichi Targets is December 2020.

An 'A' for Aspiration

You may recall from a previous article on wild spaces (*Wild Lands Advocate*, September 2018) that Canada's progress on protected areas has been incremental since Canada Target 1's inception. In 2015, 10.5 percent of Canada's terrestrial landscapes were protected under parks and other conservation measures; in the last four years, that share

only has increased by 1.3 percent. This isn't to say that Canada hasn't done anything to create new protected areas – look to Canada's new commitments to Marine Protected Areas and the \$1.3 billion Nature Fund – but is on-the-ground progress rapid enough to curb declines?

Scientists certainly don't think so. This summer, 32 scientists from 23 different universities and organizations wrote to the federal Minister of the Environment and Climate Change urging the government to accelerate the rate of protection if we are to meet Canada Target 1 by the 2020 deadline. While the federal government has protected a further 130,000 km² in four years, as of August 2019, there's another 492,981 km² left to achieve 17 percent protection; this is an area roughly three-quarters the size of Alberta.

While the government has allocated \$1.3 billion towards conservation for the coming years, it's important to note where this money will be going. Of the \$1.3 billion, \$500 million will go towards conservation partnerships, with the remaining \$800 million to support the creation of new protected areas. However the \$500 million earmarked for conservation partnerships will only be met if matched by “philanthropic, corporate, provincial, territorial

and other partners” willing to spend the same amount on land acquisitions and new protected areas. As you can imagine, getting the matched funds needed is not easy; this could be a barrier to uptake and so it's possible that not all of the committed money will actually be spent.

The federal government has been criticized for being long on aspiration, but short on action to meet their targets. Beyond the barriers to accessing funds, the 2015 Canada Targets alone may not be enough to meet the commitments made in Aichi. Hagerman and Pelai's 2016 review found that within the existing government policy framework, the Canadian government is on track to complete only 28 percent of Aichi target incentives. The remaining 72 percent of the Aichi incentives do not have any actionable policies behind them. Hagerman and Pelai's primary critique was that Canada has focused on spatially quantifiable goals (i.e. 17 percent protection under Aichi 11), while other measures like equity (Aichi 16), Indigenous rights (Aichi 18) and collaboration with non-governmental partners have fallen by the wayside.

‘B+’ for Barrier Reduction

Since Hagerman and Pelai's review was published in 2016, the federal government

has made strides to incorporate Indigenous conservation and traditional land-use into Canada Target 1. However, we're still in a *wait and see* phase. Federal Indigenous conservation efforts began with the establishment of an Indigenous Circle of Experts. These experts provide support and guidance for creating these relatively new and unprecedented protected areas in Canada. This was followed by new provisions to allow for the creation of 'Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas' (IPCAs), “lands where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems.” Here it's important to note that Indigenous Peoples have lived with and conserved the land for generations, and that the federal government is only now catching up with this fact.

So, it *seems* as though some institutional barriers to Indigenous conservation are being reduced, but as so few Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) currently exist, we don't yet know if the outcome will match the aspiration. There are a number of barriers that may stand in the way of IPCAs becoming a success. The first is the finicky relationship between provincial and federal land claims. While the federal government may be willing to

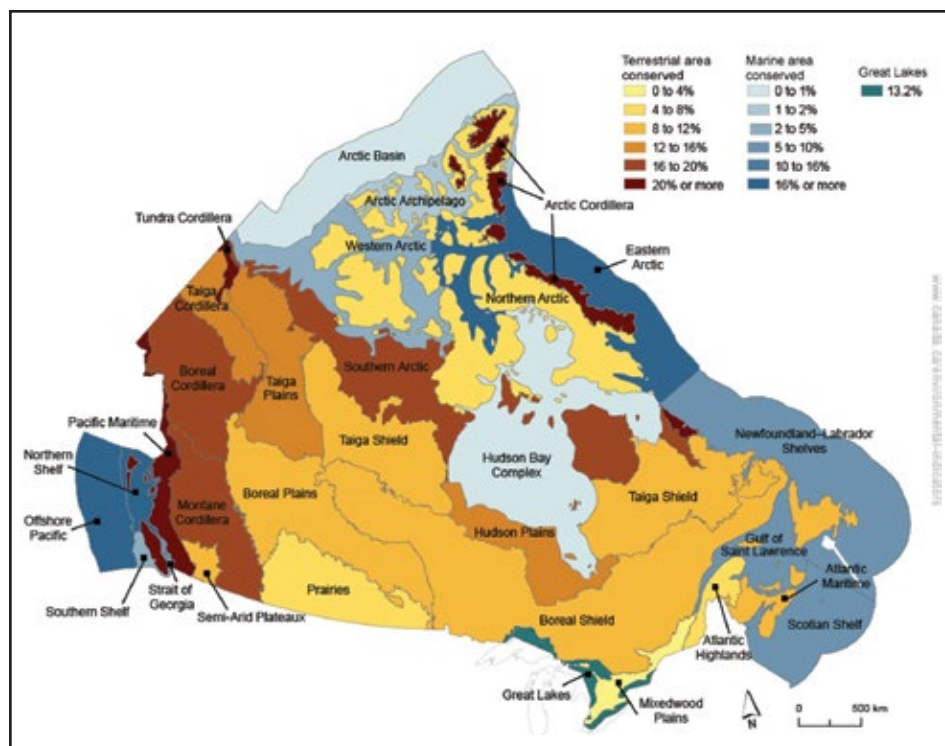


While well-known for our vast wilderness and diverse wildlife, Canada is not immune to the biodiversity losses currently being experienced across the globe. Canada has taken initiative to protect its biodiversity, but, as the ferruginous hawk in this photo wonders, are our actions fast enough, substantive enough, to combat declines? PHOTO: © C. OLSON

recognize Indigenous governance in the creation of new protected areas, the question remains whether the provinces and territories will step up to the plate. The second challenge is access to sustainable long-term funding to implement and manage these spaces. Indigenous groups are able to access funding through the Canada Nature Fund, but remember that most of this funding is only available if matched. Finally, do the proposals put forward match the government criteria for protected areas? This can be complicated by the traditional and current uses of the landscape. Only in recent years has the federal government begun to consider how traditional and current Indigenous land uses can occur simultaneously to landscape protection.

One good example of a collaboratively managed protected area is the newly announced Thaidene Nēné National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories – to be managed by Parks Canada, the Government of Northwest Territories, the Łutsël K'e Dene First Nation, and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, and with the Deninu K'ue First Nation and Yellowknives Dene First Nation. The new National Park Reserve answers many of the challenges posed above: Thaidene Nēné involves management by federal, territorial and Indigenous governments, \$40 million will be provided for infrastructure and operations in the first 12 years and \$3.4 million annually in the years that follow, and the National Park Reserve will continue to allow many activities such as hunting, berry picking and gathering, alongside numerous recreational activities.

While Thaidene Nēné is an excellent beginning to Canada's journey towards IPCAs, it's a near-standalone example. There is still a fair distance to go before IPCAs become a commonplace and recognizable form of protection. Incorporating Indigenous governance into conservation should be seen as a long-term and thoughtful undertaking. It needs to properly incorporate the principles of reconciliation and create meaningful relationships with the Indigenous groups leading the charge.



Percent protection by ecoregion in Canada. Source: Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2018.

'C' for Pan-Canadian Collaboration and Conservation Priorities

The growing pains with new forms of protection are not unique to IPCAs. They are also currently being experienced with what the federal government calls 'Other Effected Area-Based Conservation Measures' (OECMs). OECMs are a form of third-party protection, led by groups and organizations that acquire private land for conservation. They differ from legislated protected areas, as they are stewarded privately and are often found within the working landscape rather than remote wilderness areas. Seeing as some of Canada's most imperiled species are found within heavily subdivided and already developed landscapes, OECMs will be a critical piece of Canada's protected areas network.

The growing pains lie in recognizing and accounting for these spaces. Disjointedness currently exists between the federal vision of OECMs and their application within the provinces and territories. While land trusts have been helping to place conservation easements on private lands for years, generally no Canadian province or territory has included OECMs under their count

for provincial protection. The exceptions are the Northwest Territories (30,119 km²) and Ontario (33 km²).

This seems to contradict the four year, \$100 million Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) proposed earlier this year by the federal government and Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC). This fund, directed towards private land conservation, signals that in the years to come Canada will be leaning on OECMs to achieve the 17 percent target. But this won't happen unless the provinces and territories begin recognizing them as protection. The federal government has even produced a decision support tool to help provincial governments decide "what is protected enough?" However, since the tool's release there has been no little to no change in the number of OECMs recognized across Canada.

The need for OECMs is underscored by WWF-Canada's report *Protecting space for wildlife: A national habitat crisis*. The report found that Canada's current protected areas network omits many of the species and habitats with the greatest need for protection. This includes 84 percent of the areas in Canada with highest concentrations of species at risk. Look to the Canadian prai-

ries, one of the most developed yet diverse ecoregions in Canada, which has only between four and eight percent protection. OECMs could help address protecting the prairies, characterized as they are by a patchwork of private and public ownership. On the prairies, large provincial protected areas simply aren't feasible to create.

Unified action between the federal government, provinces and territories, private stakeholders and non-governmental organizations is needed to protect Canada's most at-risk areas, and this action is needed... well, now.

From setting goals to saving species

Looking beyond 2020 into the next decade, scientists and environmental non-governmental organizations have re-

iterated that 17 percent is only the beginning. Frankly, that protection target was more political than scientific. There's nothing particularly reassuring about the negotiated 17 percent protection target since the scientific literature has shown that global biodiversity may in fact need much more. Canada Target 1 should only be the launching point for a much broader conservation plan, wherein Canada establishes a comprehensive network of protected areas. A healthier biodiversity future demands large, intact habitat cores, landscape connectivity, climate refugia and equal representation of our many diverse Natural Regions.

The next meeting of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity is likely to increase the target to 30 percent. This would be a significant challenge for Canada given our current rate of protection. In the

meantime, while Canada is trying to get its act together, remember we're in the throes of a biodiversity and climate crisis.

There is overwhelming evidence that we're simply not moving fast enough to stem the species decline. Our aspirations, however, could be greatly aided by institutional and non-institutional collaboration, enabling Indigenous-led conservation efforts, and prioritizing the areas at greatest risk. The biggest concern right now is that Canada is treating the 2010 Aichi Targets as the end goal, without recognizing the marathon that lies ahead. Now is the time for Canada to improve upon its conservation record, as many species probably don't have a decade left to wait and see if we figure things out.▲

Featured Artist Lisa Brawn



Bluebird (2019)
painted woodcut block
11" x 12"

In Search Of... Conservative Champions of Conservation

By Ian Urquhart



The title of the *Science* book review was “Why conservatives abandoned conservation.” It didn’t promise a happy tale. The authors detailed a range of President Trump’s initiatives where environmental conservation became road kill. What struck me most wasn’t that Trump, to the applause of many Republicans in Congress, has abandoned conservation. Rather it’s that, in doing so, Trump abandoned conservation measures sponsored and supported by American conservatives in the Republican party.

Republican President Richard Nixon, not some tree-hugging Democrat, created the Environmental Protection Agency. Three of the conservation pillars Trump is desperate to tear down – the *Clean Air Act*, the *Clean Water Act*, and the *Endangered Species Act* – enjoyed unanimous support in the U.S. Senate. Not one Republican voted against them.

The support in the 1970s for conservation from American conservatives leads me to wonder if all of today’s conservatives are as violently opposed to conservation as President Trump is. Is the abandonment universal? Or, can the case still be made that conservatives can, will, and should support conservation?

The case used in this issue of the *Advocate* to support the contention that environmental conservation still can enjoy an important place among political conservatives comes from coastal states in the United States. In early 2018 the Trump administration proposed a dramatic expansion of petroleum exploration and exploitation activities in U.S. offshore waters. Currently, 94 percent of Outer Continental Shelf waters is off limits to the petroleum industry. The Interior Department’s 2018 plan

proposed to turn the offshore waters balance between conservation and exploitation on its head. More than 90 percent of those waters would be opened for exploration if Interior and the President get their way. The rationale for Trump’s ambitions comes straight out of his “Make America Great Again” playbook. Then Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said it would help the U.S. achieve “American Energy Dominance.”

What struck me about this plan wasn’t Trump’s enthusiasm to drill everywhere. Instead, it was the reaction from Republicans governing coastal states. Republican governors all along the Atlantic seaboard objected loudly to this plan. All of those governors tied their opposition to the threat offshore drilling poses to multi-billion dollar tourism industries. Conservation needed to be privileged, in part, because of this threat to tourism industries relying on healthy coastal environments. New Jersey’s Republican governor Chris Christie’s department of environmental protection “opposed any industrialization of our coast.” Offshore drilling would threaten the state’s vital \$44 billion tourism industry as well as the recreational and commercial fishing industries that “are also critical to our economic health.” But Christie’s objections were based on more than “just” the economic dimension. “These waters are home to plant, fish, mammal and avian species, including federally listed endangered species,” his environmental protection commissioner wrote. “The risk of adverse impacts to our marine waters and the species that depend on them is unacceptable.” Environment, culture, and economy all figured in Christie’s opposi-

tion. Republican governors from Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida joined in this chorus.

For now, the Trump administration’s plans are on hold. In April 2019, after losing a case in Alaska, the Department of Interior said it was indefinitely putting on hold plans to allow drilling in South Carolina’s offshore waters. Republican Governor Henry McMaster welcomed the decision: “South Carolinians can remain confident that we will continue our efforts to protect our pristine coastline and invaluable tourism industry from the destructive threats of seismic testing and offshore drilling.”

April also saw the Republican-controlled South Carolina Senate pass a measure to make it difficult to build the infrastructure on the mainland needed to support offshore drilling. It too placed greater value on the need to spare the state’s beaches and coastline from the threat of drilling than on the jobs the industry promises to the state if it’s allowed to explore offshore.

On September 13th, as AWA members were getting ready to enjoy the Wild West Saloon, Republican Governor McMaster joined a federal Democrat – House Representative Joe Cunningham – to celebrate House passage of Cunningham’s bill to ban offshore drilling off of the U.S. Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

Does this example of conservatives supporting conservation mean all conservatives will find religion and embrace conservation? Of course not. But what it does illustrate is that it’s foolish to think that, by definition, environmental conservation is contrary to political conservatism. Conservative politicians should be reminded of that. 🐻



Louise Guy Poetry Corner

WHAT IF WE DID THIS DIFFERENTLY?

By Audrey Lane Cockett

What if we did this differently?

Have you tried to explain manageable risk to the stonefly?
Showed your permits to the uprooted spruce?
Asked the benthic for its bottom line?
What did John Deere say to the white-tailed warnings?
It all sounds like a joke sometimes.

But the audience is concrete and contracts
Chain of command and out of our hands
Power tools, and
Metal arguments

What if we did this differently?

Meet me in the meadow
Lay in the sweet grass while you tell me of the 8 lanes you
are dreaming of.
Ask the tender balsam buds
If it is possible to heal
Every rotting stump knows when to stop fighting
Talk to them
Ask the sapling growing from its remains
What it means to be grateful
I know it seems like there is too much dust to settle
Not enough rain
The sweet berries have jet lag
I wonder if next year they will taste like smoke and
power lines
I guess we'll see

Fairs fair

So maybe I'll meet you in rush hour traffic
While I ask you to consider the risk
Sift through paperwork and balance a budget
While I convince you that it's worth it to spend extra on
a bridge
A sound wall
A corridor
A box for bats

What if we did this differently?

Dropped the bleeding hearts and blame
Dropped the indifference and disconnect
Dropped the ignorant arrogance, and listened

Found ourselves a language that isn't built on bitter
That didn't come ready to be disappointed

What if we listened to each other?
What if we asked more questions?
Let stories move us
Let challenge inspire
Listen. Grow. Ground. Connect. Give. Accept.
Care.

Care needs to be cultivated.
Connected.
Breathing.
Solutions are a living thing.

What if we did this differently?

THE PARKWAY BIKE TRAIL

By Jill Seaton

A rare and blessed wilderness that other lands have lost
Still shelters all the wildlife that call this park their home.
In spring come birds from southern spheres to find familiar
woods

The grass grows green and first flowers bloom as the bear
comes down

From the Endless Chain to scratch its back on a favourite
tree.

Caribou of the Brazeau herd still feed on their ancient land
As the eagle soars and sees the wild – as it was meant to be.

But there are plans to open up Pandora's box
And let destruction out. A bike trail like a long black snake
Will slither south through meadow, woods and stream;
Rocks will be blasted, trees felled and wildlife's trails
destroyed.

Bears will search in vain for berries, shredded by machine,
And dandelions now poisoned by those who want
To 'share the land with wildlife' – whatever that may mean.

High above, the eagle soars and sees the earth destroyed,
Sees creatures driven from their dens while birds that lose
their nest trees

Call distractedly below; watches as the caribou their ancient
land forswear

As a hard, paved trail snakes forward to usurp what once
was theirs.

The fierce eye of the eagle sees the mother bear
That once enjoyed the fresh spring grass that grew on this
good earth

Wander off with two small cubs in search of other fare.

Tired souls came from concrete lands to see this envied wild
With lofty peaks and tangled streams, primordial,
Mirroring this country's past and its present fragile beauty.
Thousands came to wonder, heal, and leave refreshed
They saw the bears, they saw the wild, but now they'll only
see

A long black snake that kills the earth and kills the peace
Where protected wilderness was meant to be.

Featured Artist Lisa Brawn

Peregrine (2018)
painted woodcut block
9.5 x 9.5"

Woodpecker (2018)
painted woodcut block
10.25" x 9.5"



Jill and Basil Seaton - Jasper's Refined Firebrands

By Vivian Pharis, AWA Board Member Emeritus

Mike McIvor of Bow Valley Naturalists calls Jill Seaton, “The Voice” of Jasper Park conservation and Ben Gadd declared Jill and her husband Basil to be the movement’s “heart and soul.” Everyone I spoke to about the impact Jill and Basil had on Jasper town and park, from retired park wardens to their town neighbours and fellow naturalists throughout the province, describe the

couple as the utmost tireless defenders of park values - true eco-warriors!

When Jill, now nearly 90, hosted me and my two Labrador dogs overnight this early August, she was full of fun, enthusiasm, and remembrances. She and Basil had shared a lifetime of adventure and challenges, including living in Jasper for the past 30 years. Their tales are many and bold. Jill is known for standing up to absurd park pronouncements with “bring it on - I like a good fight!” I visited her to find out what had sparked her and Basil’s unabashed love of Jasper and environs and what was behind their determination to dig in there in a long-term defensive position.

As it turns out, references to “war” and “entrenchment” are apt for these two. Basil spent his early life serving in the British and then the Canadian armies. Early in his military career, Basil earned heroic recognition for battle feats on the Afghan/India border and in the jungles of Burma where he nearly lost his life. In Canada, Basil served as an army Captain and trained soldiers heading to battlefields in Korea. Stationed in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Edmonton, he finally retired from the military after a stint with the Department of Veterans’ Affairs at a post with Calgary’s Colonel Belcher Hospital. Camp Gagetown in New Brunswick was where Basil first sampled Canada’s wilds and found them appealing and worth greater exploration.

Meanwhile Jill, having survived English and Swiss boarding schools, was sailing to

far-flung places like Malta and Jeddah in the Red Sea with her father, an Australian ex-Newfoundland bush pilot. In 1951 she arrived in Canada to visit her mother, met Basil in Ottawa, and married him after a six-week whirlwind romance.

Little in life seemed to faze the newlyweds as they moved from place to place in western Canada, searching for adventure and challenge. They sampled Alberta and various locations in BC; along the way bringing up a son and a daughter. Each new place opened their eyes to what was happening to the land and they began speaking up for voiceless wildlife and defending landscapes from human exploitations.

The early 1970s found them on an acreage near Okotoks where Jill became incensed about the plight of Alberta’s coyotes, then officially regarded as “pests,” open to any type of brutal killing, any time of the year. Coyotes were poisoned, run to exhaustion with snowmobiles, shot from truck windows, and hunted with dogs. Together with Grant MacEwan’s daughter Heather, they formed “Coyote Concern” and eventually got a change in Alberta hunting regulations that provided a halt to persecution, at least during breeding season.

The Seatons’ next move was to Burns Lake in northwestern BC, but not before Dr. Lu Carbyn, the dedicated wolf defender and researcher, asked Jill to help with his campaign to protect wolves under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Jill’s canine experience to date had been coyote defense, so she was taken aback by Lou’s request. But,



once ensconced at Burn's Lake, she decided to interview area ranchers for their views on wolves and wolf control. Lou was impressed with her interesting findings and arranged for Jill to present them before an IUCN meeting in Edmonton. Jill had both feet on the road to activism!

Next, they moved to Cortes Island off Vancouver Island, where they stayed 11 years. Here Basil became a soldier in the intractable fight against aquaculture and to save wild salmon from its consequences. They were on Cortes Island during the 1980s when people were being arrested for standing up against the clearcutting of old growth forests. Jill was one of those arrested on Vancouver Island, but not over logging. Rather, she and 73 others stood in defense of Strathcona Park where Cream Silver Mine was preparing to set up operations on park lands. Having crossed a rope barrier to access the drilling area the activists were arrested and taken by police cruisers to Campbell River. A judge finally threw the case out and Cream Silver withdrew from the area. Would she do it all again? "Of course - the cause was right!"

Cortes Island's dark winter skies and no place to hike but clearcuts, drove the Seatons to seek snow for cross-country skiing and sunny days. Where else could provide these, but Jasper, Alberta? They sampled three of Jasper's winters from 1990-1992 before deciding this was their paradise. Besides, Jill was offered a job by one of Jasper's icons, Ben Gadd. Ben, through the Friends of Jasper National Park, was setting up an educational institute known as The Jasper Institute, to provide people with weekend instruction in wildlife matters, wildflower identification, natural history and park issues. University credit could be gained through taking some courses. Instruction was by knowledgeable, qualified people like Drs. George Scotter, Val Geist and Paul Paquet and Jill became The Institute's Registrar and all-around handy person

Basil and Jill were attracted to Jasper by the mountains and thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed the range of outdoor

opportunities on offer. The longer they stayed, the more appreciative and defensive they became. Basil assumed a broad approach, encompassing global environmentalism, informing himself in depth with issues like climate change and the impact of relentless human growth on the world, and could soon speak authoritatively on how a changing climate could affect global food supply or park wildlife. Jill leaned more toward a naturalist's interests, becoming "the voice" for dwindling caribou herds, goats squeezed from their habitats and harlequin ducks impacted by rafters. Together, their formidable skills in research and communication allowed them to wade through stacks of convoluted "park speak" documents, ferret out the essence, write endless, clear replies and submissions and maintain an informative web site, all on behalf of basic park values. They both served long terms as President of the small, but large-voiced, Jasper Environmental Association (JEA).

Over the years, the tsunami of tourist development proposals that were surging over Banff and Lake Louise began to hit Jasper's shores too. The Seatons and JEA stood firm though and undoubtedly turned the tide back on many schemes that could make people rich at park expense. Without them, Jasper would surely be further down the road towards ugly Banffification than it is. Foremost amongst the fronts they held at bay are expansions to the Maligne Lake Lodge and to more ski development in Marmot Basin on critical caribou and goat habitat. Stopping rafting on the important harlequin duck habitat of the Maligne River was a satisfying success, as was bringing sense to the loss of critical wildlife habitat that a second long, linear transportation route, this one for bicycles, would have on the Banff-Jasper corridor. But, it is very hard to curtail established tourism providers like Brewster, (now owned by the American company Viad, Brewster attractions are now part of Viad's "Pursuit Collection" of properties). Despite the use of social media to gain, in short order, 192,000 signatures against a

proposed Glacier Skywalk defilement of the Columbia Ice Fields area the project went ahead.

Provincial conservation groups like AWA, are forever indebted to people like Mike and Deanne McIvor in Banff and the Bow Valley Naturalists, and to Basil and Jill Seaton and the JEA, for so reliably keeping us informed and "holding the fort" on park issues. Undoubtedly these local groups often felt abandoned in their considerable efforts by their larger provincial counterparts, who themselves were feeling overwhelmed by the load of "beyond park" issues they were grappling with.

Basil passed away in 2011, leaving Jill to carry on in military style, which she has done. She remains a main driver of the feisty little JEA, maintains its website, and sends out critical action alerts and updates on park issues. Jill is fondly remembered by folks like the McIvors for what could be a disarmingly humorous approach to dastardly tourism proposals like the Brewster Skywalk. She helped to organize a "get together" near the Ice Fields Centre where part of the entertainment was to spoof the Skywalk as the "Silly Walk" as per John Cleese and his Monty Python skit, and where "B. Rooster" also played a role. The event provided a welcome relief to those who had tied themselves in knots trying to turn Parks Canada's attention back towards key park values.

Asked about the future, Jill expresses regret for the political direction being forced on Banff and Jasper National Parks and by the replacement of local staff with those sympathetic with development. "The good people have left, the ones that upheld park values - I don't know what the outcome will be." Banff's McIvors know, and have labelled it "over-tourism".

Undoubtedly Jill wishes that Jasper be spared. 🌲

WILD WEST SALOON

Clear skies and warm late summer temperatures graced AWA's annual Wild West Saloon on September 13th. Judging by the smiles and laughter, AWA's members and guests had a great time at this year's party and fundraiser. Soul Kitchen BBQ delighted our palates with their mouth-watering main courses while Village Ice Cream proved their equal when it came to the dessert offerings. Outside the Hillhurst Cottage School, our two firepits were centrepieces for many

conversations. Inside, when people weren't dancing to the beats of the Sadlier-Brown band or playing games of chance, guests supported your association's mission through raffles, a bake sale, and a silent auction. Through the generosity of more than 100 attendees we raised more than \$20,000 for wilderness conservation. Thanks to all who joined us for this year's Saloon. We hope to see even more wilderness supporters in September 2020.





Photos by
K. Mihalcheon and
D. Morasch

Owen Duke's Wild Lemonade Stand

All photos courtesy of Tracy Duke.

Early this summer Owen Duke set up a lemonade stand...wait, make that a Tiki Bar... and Owen generously donated some of the proceeds from his sales to AWA. If this isn't an example of the pro-

verbial glass being half full, we don't know what is! Owen, thank you for your donation and for your efforts to make Alberta's future a little wilder.

I will be sharing some of our proceeds with the AWA (Alberta Wilderness Association).

- They have been a voice for the environment since 1965.
- The AWA has inspired communities to care for Alberta's wild spaces through awareness and action.
- With a provincial office and library in Calgary, AWA has active members, volunteers, and sponsors throughout Alberta and beyond.
- AWA is a non-profit, federally registered, charitable society
- Check out their website at www.albertawilderness.ca



Updates

Meeting with Minister Nixon

On July 31, I set off from Calgary for a chance to see what was new in our Castle Provincial Park and to attend a meeting at the newly renovated Syncline Group Camp with Environment and Parks Minister Jason Nixon. It was an informal meeting and sitting across a picnic table from Minister Nixon I had an informal conversation with him about AWA. We discussed AWA's concerns over the remaining kilometres in the Castle Provincial Park that need to be closed and the legal requirement to protect WSCT. We also discussed regional planning and the work former Minister Ted Morton did to ensure cumulative impact measures were part of bringing economy, environment, and land uses back into balance.

The Minister let us know he had been calling stakeholders about caribou and a draft section 11 agreement under SARA that Alberta and Canada will be going forward with. Public consultation on this agreement will take place.

The meeting was part of a tour the Minister took and there were other meetings with other stakeholder groups that day and the next. MLAs from Taber Warner, Lethbridge East, and Livingstone MacLeod along with Assistant Deputy Ministers Conrad and Fernandez, and a number of parks planning staff were at the meeting. Colleagues from Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition, Y2Y and CPAWS Southern Alberta and Northern Alberta were also part of this meeting. We look forward to continuing the conversation with the Minister and his staff.

- Christyann Olson

Caribou: Two new draft conservation agreements, three new task forces

August 2019 brought several new planning proposals for Alberta's threatened woodland caribou. The most far-reaching, potentially, was a draft 'conservation agreement' between the federal and Alberta governments. It contains timelines and actions for Alberta to follow as it develops range plans to meet at least the minimum habitat requirements for woodland caribou. AWA welcomed the start of the public comment period for the draft. The provincial consultation lasts until October 6, 2019. To participate, visit this website: <https://talkaep.alberta.ca/caribou-conservation-agreement>.

Under the federal government's 2012 woodland caribou recovery strategy, Alberta should have completed habitat-focused caribou range plans by 2017. These plans should have outlined how cumulative human-caused land disturbances in caribou home ranges will be reduced to levels that can support self-sustaining caribou populations. In 2019, not a single Alberta caribou range plan has yet been finalized. Since habitat conditions continue to deteriorate it's vital to act as soon as possible. There literally is no time to lose.

The draft Canada-Alberta agreement has many positive aspirations. For example, it proposes that range plans have legal standing; they should be established under provincial law. Also, Indigenous collaboration is acknowledged as important for caribou conservation. Other positive proposals are:

- to develop forest management plans that would set harvest levels that support caribou recovery, including the phase-out of mountain pine beetle surge clearcuts;
- to develop energy infrastructure and access plans so as to maintain and restore habitat; and
- that energy and forestry approvals would include conditions to reduce cumulative effects to caribou habitat.

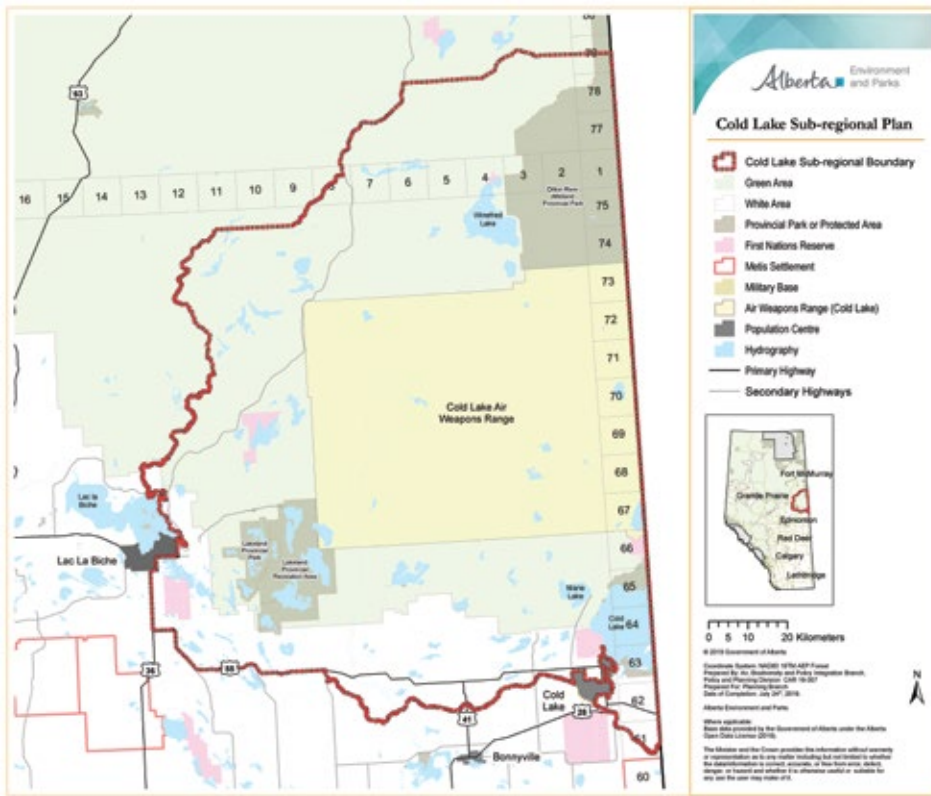
It would be a great step forward if legally binding plans with these habitat measures were completed. More species than caribou would benefit if these intentions are realized on the landscape. Alberta's threatened native fish and other wildlife rely on intact or older forests and also would benefit greatly from long-overdue cumulative effects management in caribou ranges.

However, history suggests that too many promising proposals end up in the graveyard of good intentions. There is no certainty that these measures will be implemented as described and in a way that adequately protects caribou critical habitat. There are troubling gaps in the draft Canada-Alberta agreement. Some of the most serious ones are:

- it lacks interim habitat protection during the time that range plan discussions and planning are proposed to occur, making it likely that habitat disturbance will continue to grow;
- the timeline for implementing most of these measures is still years away and there is no mechanism of accountability if these timelines are missed;
- it lacks a funding commitment; and
- it omits a target decade by which Alberta will achieve and maintain at least the minimum habitat requirements for self-sustaining caribou.

In the past, encouraging sounding Alberta caribou declarations have not led to meaningful habitat actions. Despite the Alberta government's approval of the 2005 Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan and 2011 Caribou Policy, extensive forest fragmentation and habitat loss marches along. Alberta continues to put too many eggs in the wildlife manipulation basket. This emphasis delivers horrific mass wolf culls in several ranges and a pilot project to fence calving females in enclosures, all of which risk being expensive distractions from necessary habitat actions.

This agreement doesn't change a fundamental AWA position. AWA believes this



The Cold Lake sub-region is an area where one of three newly struck provincial task forces will focus on for woodland caribou recovery measures. AWA will participate on each task force.

agreement in no way substitutes for the federal Environment Minister's and federal government's responsibilities to protect critical habitat under s. 61 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Caribou urgently need interim, measured federal orders on unprotected provincial lands. These interim measures would spur both government and industry to actually complete and implement legally enforceable range plans that achieve at least minimum caribou habitat requirements.

A second recently released planning document is a draft conservation agreement negotiated between the federal government and the Cold Lake First Nations. AWA applauds this agreement. It is an important step to enhance Cold Lake First Nations' capacity and leadership to recover woodland caribou within its traditional territory in northeast Alberta and northwest Saskatchewan.

The agreement's "Shared Recovery Objective" is laudable: "to set out and confirm the actions that the Parties have agreed to take in order to support the achievement of a self-sustaining population in the Cold Lake Boreal Caribou Range, consistent with the population and distribution objectives in the

[federal boreal woodland caribou] Recovery Strategy, that will support traditional Indigenous harvesting activities, consistent with existing Indigenous Rights".

The agreement includes a timetable for cooperation and investigation of a number of positive measures over the next several years, including habitat restoration and conservation. A hitch may be that, with the range entirely situated on provincial lands, progress will ultimately depend on the Alberta government's willingness to advance the habitat and stewardship goals.

Alberta took a third notable initiative. It is launching three caribou sub-regional task forces this fall to recommend caribou recovery actions. One task force will be focused on the Cold Lake region, which should build on the momentum generated by both the Canada-Cold Lake First Nations agreement and the useful habitat restoration work piloted by some oil sands companies in that region. The two other sub-regions are the northwest Alberta Bistcho region, and the so-called 'Upper Smoky' region of west central Alberta. The Upper Smoky includes ranges of the Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway

mountain caribou, which federal Environment Minister McKenna determined in May 2018 are facing imminent threats such that immediate intervention was required to enable their eventual recovery.

Each task force will consist of 12 to 16 members; each will include representatives from indigenous communities, municipalities, industries, recreation groups, trappers and environmental NGOs. Task forces will consider regional economic, access, and habitat scenarios and recommend land use approaches. AWA will have one delegate on each task force; we see this as an important opportunity to contribute. We will urge our fellow members to endorse land management solutions that will achieve and maintain habitat requirements for self-sustaining caribou in a reasonable time horizon while supporting environmentally sustainable economies.

The Cold Lake task force is intended to move fast: it will start meeting in September and will make its recommendations in November 2019. The Alberta government has stated it will then draft a Cold Lake sub-regional land use plan for caribou recovery by the end of 2019. Public and Indigenous consultations will then be conducted on that draft plan.

The other two sub-regional processes are intended to be similar, with somewhat longer timelines. Task forces for Bistcho and Upper Smoky will start this fall, with a Bistcho sub-regional plan to be drafted in spring 2020, and Upper Smoky sub-regional plan to be drafted by the fall of 2020.

It is positive that these task forces, which are listed as an action in the draft Canada-Alberta conservation agreement, are getting underway. Time will tell whether these processes work. We hope these two conservation agreements, when finalized, actually will make meaningful progress towards securing habitat for self-sustaining wild caribou in healthy forests.

- Carolyn Campbell

Update: Introducing the Wild Alberta Interactive Map

As a provincial organization, AWA works throughout Alberta to create awareness of and action for wilderness, wildlife, and wild waters – but where exactly is “Wild Alberta”? Since AWA’s birth in 1965, we have endeavoured to answer that question. We began with kitchen-table conversations and simple bubbles drawn on paper maps. Thanks to advancements in GIS and tremendous help from experts and volunteers, we have refined our map into an on-line public resource that helps define where “Wild Alberta” is. We’re excited to introduce our Wild Alberta Interactive Map!

The map is our newest resource to help researchers, explorers, colleagues, students, authors, politicians and engaged Albertans



learn about our natural home. It identifies Alberta’s six distinct Natural Regions, currently protected landscapes, and the priority areas AWA calls our Areas of Concern.

Our Areas of Concern are the landscapes we believe have important wilderness values: high biodiversity, specific/unique landscape features, and vital wildlife habitat. We hope, and strive to ensure, that these landscapes will be as pristine, breathtaking, and intact 100 years from now as

they are today.

Please take a few moments to check out the map and learn a little about our Wild Alberta. Also, we would love to hear from you about your own favourite wild space and what it means to you. Visit the map at www.albertawilderness.ca/wild-alberta

Happy navigating!

- Your Alberta Wilderness Association Team

Update: 100 Debates on the Environment and AWA’s Federal All-Candidates Forum

Join us at AWA Cottage School on October 3rd for a Calgary Confederation all-candidates forum. This forum is one of ‘100 Debates on the Environment,’ a non-partisan project aiming to bring voters together at the riding level to hear candidates’ best policy ideas for the environment.

Leading up to the 43rd Canadian General Election, 100 debates are being held in 100 ridings across the country. They all address four common questions on the environment: climate change, wilderness conservation, water security, and pollution. We hope you’ll join us in starting the conversation!

Date: Thursday, October 3, 2019

Time: 7:00-9:00pm

Location: AWA Cottage School,

455 12 Street NW, Calgary

Visit albertawilderness.ca/events for more information

Fortress Mountain Ski Hill Should Not Truck Mountain Water to Calgary

Fortress Mountain ski hill is proposing to remove 50 million litres per year of water flowing into Kananaskis’ Galatea Creek and truck it downstream to a Calgary bottling facility. Many AWA members and other concerned Albertans have stated they strongly oppose this water use proposal.

Fortress ski hill lease holders were granted a license in 1968 to withdraw water to supply potable water for their ski business (in 1987, they received a separate snow-making water license, which is not involved in this proposal). Fortress ski hill withdraws water from an unnamed stream that flows into Galatea Creek. The well known ‘Galatea’ hiking trail in Kananaskis’ Spray Valley Provincial Park criss-crosses Galatea Creek many times. Galatea Creek flows into the Kananaskis River, which in turn flows into the Bow River.

The 1968 water license allows Fortress to remove annually 98.678 million litres for its ski hill operations. Fortress now indicates it will not use 50 million litres per year of that total. It proposes to sell that unused portion. Trucks will take this water, branded for its

‘purity’, to be bottled or canned and then sold. Every year thousands of truckloads of water will be taken from Kananaskis and bottled for consumers in Calgary.

Alberta Environment and Parks confirmed to the *Rocky Mountain Outlook* newspaper in July 2019 that Fortress’ application was to truck the water to a bottling facility in Calgary. Fortress’ management has not stated a definite destination or product format. The statement of concern that AWA submitted to regulators and elected decision makers is based on this intent – one that obviously wasn’t considered when Fortress applied for its 1968 license.

Fortress has stated that it opposes single use plastic bottles. However, Fortress’ managing director Tom Heath also stated to a CBC reporter in July 2019: “We’re looking to sell the water. What the buyer wants to do with us, it could be, God only knows, it could be bottled water, but we won’t have anything to do with it. Think of us like an oil well. We are not a gas station.”

Although this water will be marketed for its ‘purity’ the scheme actually is environmentally damaging. Its higher impacts include:

- removing water from a small mountain



Fortress ski hill proposes to withdraw 50 million litres of water per year that would otherwise flow into Kananaskis' Galatea Creek. The water would be trucked downstream and sold for its 'purity.' PHOTO: © C. CAMPBELL

stream flowing into a protected area in the Bow River basin headwaters;

- greenhouse gas emissions to pump and transport thousands of truckloads per year of water that is already flowing naturally to Calgary; and
- helping to promote bottled/canned water as 'purer' than the high quality municipal drinking water Calgarians currently enjoy. We need to greatly reduce our overall packaging and waste, not increase it.

Most of the flows of the Bow and other major Alberta rivers comes from mountain 'headwaters' lands and the snow, rain, and melting glacier water they provide. During high flows, channels are formed and flushed, nutrients and sediment are transported downstream, riparian areas are changed and renewed. A portion of runoff and channel flows are absorbed into the ground to emerge later as the essential year-round 'base flows' to our rivers. During low flow periods, aquatic life can be limited by water scarcity. Mountain ecosystems are also especially vulnerable to the uncertainties posed by climate change. Considering these factors, water that is not needed for its approved purpose should remain in waterways in Kananaskis; extracting it, trucking

it, selling it...those are the last things that should happen to this water.

While 50 million litres per year is not a large portion of the flow in the Bow River watershed, this scheme proposes to establish a very troubling precedent. Our water resources are limited and AWA strongly opposes this poor re-allocation option. In the 50 years since the Fortress water license was issued, much has changed. Substantial risks, not appreciated in the 1960s, now surround the future of water in the Bow River basin:

- the Bow River basin is now closed to new surface water licenses – regardless of how small – because of over-allocation concerns, both for aquatic ecosystems and prior rights holders.
- even without factoring in climate change, there is now strong scientific evidence that pre-20th century droughts in the Bow River basin were much more severe than the flow levels experienced in the 20th century. The flows in the last century were used to guide the amount of water issued in Bow River basin water licenses;
- there are even greater risks of severe droughts in the Bow with the predicted disappearance of most Rocky Mountain

glaciers by 2100, and with other future climate-change affected flow risks;

Fortress' license was issued in 1968 for a particular use, timing, and location. Managing the cumulative impacts to our water resources for future generations and the health of aquatic ecosystems requires responsible allocation decisions of Bow waters, no matter how large or small the license. Fortress ski hill should have the highest water conservation practices possible given its privileged position surrounded by Alberta mountain parks. In AWA's view, this proposal – so contrary to the purposes of the initial license – demands that the water should be left where it belongs, in the mountain stream.

In an August 22 opinion column in Banff's *Crag and Canyon*, climber Brandon Pullan writes: "I was stoked for Fortress Mountain ski resort to open, but if they start selling water to bottling companies, I'll be skiing elsewhere." From the letters to Alberta Environment and Parks Minister Nixon, MLAs, regulatory officials and Fortress that AWA was copied on, we know that many Albertans likewise strongly oppose Fortress' water use proposal.

- Carolyn Campbell

Letter to the Editor

“While in her article “Finding Wild Space in an Urban Place” (June 2019 issue) Grace Wark correctly identifies many of the difficulties of creating and maintaining wildness and wildlife in urban settings, I do not believe that she gets to the core of the problem. Simply put, under the present system, municipalities have no money for the natural environment. Big, rapidly-growing cities like Calgary and Edmonton need all their revenue to finance their expansion, the new infrastructure and services required by urban sprawl, as well as maintain existing infrastructure. Small municipalities with static or shrinking populations and economies likewise have no money for anything but basic social needs, which inevitably, in either situation, take priority. And as long as property taxes are a significant part of municipal income and jobs a top election issue, municipalities will always encourage development, with consequent loss of natural areas and ecological connectivity.

So, it isn't “just a matter of supporting more thoughtful planning for urban parks and protected areas to counterbalance current trends in suburban growth.” It's a matter of a whole social system, of how revenue is generated. It is also a matter of human nature, of putting human priorities first, and of a lack of ecological understanding. When we do devote funding to green spaces it is largely because of their perceived value for human health and recreation, not for reasons of ecological integrity and connectivity.

Edmonton's *Ribbon of Green* program and plans for expansion, for example, exist largely to provide access for recreation to the North Saskatchewan River Valley and ravine system by way of trails and appropriate infrastructure; it pays only lip service to ecological integrity. (Even without increased access Edmonton's river valley is in danger of being seriously overused, although not for immersion in nature!) Wark also refers to Edmonton's *Breathe* strategy, but here again the objective is primarily human-centred: to provide equitable open space to all communities, and it relies heavily on the river valley to do this. And it is only a strategy, not even a plan, and a long way from being operational.

Creating Big Island Provincial Park in southwest Edmonton may sound like a great idea. However, this 400-hectare area (compare Calgary's Fish Creek Provincial Park at 1348 hectares) could mean its ecological destruction if it is not done properly, with appropriate limitations on recreational expectations.

Meanwhile, Edmonton is threatened with loss of river valley parkland. The City is giving serious consideration to the re-industrialization of the river valley with the construction of a 45,000 solar panel farm on river bottomland.

What then is the answer, if indeed there is one, to having wild space in our municipalities? A long-term goal is surely to affect a paradigm change, from one in which endless growth is seen as both necessary and desirable, to one of true sustainability. Without growth, the pressure to develop and to consume is immediately lessened. In the shorter term it must mean that municipalities come to recognize that adequate spending on maintaining healthy ecosystems in their own right is part of essential urban infrastructure. (Federal funding to help municipalities participate in achieving the international goal of 17 percent land set aside as protected area in Canada could be a big help.)

Finally, I believe that naturalists, conservationists and natural scientists have a big role to play in convincing both the public and political leaders that a paradigm shift towards making the protection of nature a top priority is both a moral and a practical imperative. We need an explosion of public activism in favour of nature.

Sincerely,
Patsy Cotterill
Edmonton

Notice to Members

Annual General Meeting of Alberta Wilderness Assn

November 23, 2019
10 am

AWA Hillhurst Cottage School
455 – 12 Street NW, Calgary

AWA's By-laws were last revised in 1997. During this past year the Board of Directors has reviewed AWA's By-laws and propose some minor updates including more contemporary spelling of by-law from bylaw in the existing document. The By-laws with present and proposed changes were posted on the AWA website at the end of August. A resolution to accept the changes will be presented by the Secretary/Treasurer of the Board of Directors to the membership at the AGM on November 23, 2019.

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Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:

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