

Alberta Wilderness Association



Annual Report 2018 - 2019





Wilderness for Tomorrow

AWA's mission to *Defend Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action* by inspiring communities to care is as vital, relevant and necessary as it ever was. AWA is dedicated to protecting our wild spaces and helping create a world where wild places, wildlife and our environment don't need protecting. As members and supporters, you inspire the AWA team; your support in spirit, in person and with your financial gifts makes a difference. We trust you will be inspired by the stories told in this 2018 – 2019 annual report.

Contributions to the Annual Report are provided by AWA board and staff members with thanks to Carolyn Campbell, Joanna Skrajny, Grace Wark, Nissa Petterson, Ian Urquhart, Owen McGoldrick, Vivian Pharis, Cliff Wallis, Chris Saunders and Sean Nichols.

- Christyann Olson, Executive Director



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Golden Eye Mother and Chicks on the Cardinal River and Mountain Bluebird at her nest © C. Olson



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A Successful Year

The conclusion of 2019 marks the end of another successful year for the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). From northern Alberta's boreal to the Rocky Mountains, the foothills, grasslands and parklands, AWA is making a difference. Our valued conservation staff continues to evolve both their skills and personal leadership within their areas of responsibility. We are pleased to share with you that AWA has been recognized as a Top 100 Rated Charity by Charity Intelligence Canada. We look forward to 2020 with renewed enthusiasm to tackle the challenges of the next decade leveraging experience and lessons learned from the last five decades of conservation efforts in Wild Alberta.

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

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

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

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

- Owen McGoldrick, President



Board and Staff

Board of Directors

President:	Owen McGoldrick, Calgary
First Vice-President:	Jim Campbell, Calgary
Second Vice-President:	Richard Secord, Edmonton
Secretary/Treasurer:	Cliff Wallis, Calgary
Directors:	Clint Docken, Bragg Creek
	Chris Saunders, Calgary
	Frank Calder, Edmonton
	Gail Docken, Edmonton
	Jamie Jack, Calgary (<i>joined the board in January 2019</i>)
Director Emeritus:	Vivian Pharis, Cochrane

AWA's board of directors is composed of dedicated volunteers with specific attributes and skill sets that support the needs of the organization and the staff. The board is a governance board supporting the staff to achieve priorities and goals for the association. Their strength helps achieve AWA's mission. Elections for the board are held annually at the Annual General Meeting.

Staff

Executive Director:	Christyann Olson, BN, MSc
Conservation Specialists:	Carolyn Campbell, BA, BEd, MA, MBA
	Joanna Skrajny, BSc
	Grace Wark, BSc
	Nissa Petterson, BSc
	Sean Nichols, BSc (<i>casual support staff</i>)
Wild Lands Advocate Editor and Conservation Staff:	Ian Urquhart, PhD
Administrative Associate:	Diane Mihalcheon
Book keeper:	Kim Bilan (<i>hired October 2018</i>)

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



AWA

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

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

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

The following pages provide a reasonably comprehensive review of our work and add to the archival record of annual reports that began in the 1960's. We are encouraged by the progress made and believe in our ability to make a difference. New to this document are three infographic images that summarize some of AWA's achievements and priorities in this year. You will find the infographic summary pages included near the end of the report.

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



Mission, Vision, Values, Objectives

Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action

For more than 50 years, AWA has spoken in defence of those who have no voice: wild lands, wildlife, and wild waters throughout Alberta. From grassroots beginnings in the kitchens of backcountry enthusiasts, ranchers, and outfitters, we have grown into an independent province-wide conservation organization, well-recognized for our tenacity, integrity, and longevity. When necessary, we are uncompromisingly outspoken and willing to engage politically on provincial conservation issues.

Our work spans the entire province, and we represent a wide diversity of more than 7,000 members and supporters throughout 210 Alberta communities, across Canada and around the world that care about protecting the province's wild places. There was reasonable membership growth this year and we plan to continue emphasizing growth in youth memberships this coming year.

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

Vision

Protected Wilderness

There will be a comprehensive system of protected wild areas.

Decision-making Society

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

Effective and Credible Advocates

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

Independent

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

Values

Ecocenteredness

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

Integrity

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

Respectfulness

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

Participation

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

Tenacity



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

Passion

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

Objectives

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

To safeguard and restore the wild, natural ecosystems of Alberta

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

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

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



Great Gray Owl is the name AWA chose for awards that recognize outstanding leadership and dedication by a volunteer © Robert R. Taylor



Conservation, Stewardship, Outreach

CONSERVATION

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

This 2018 - 2019 annual report tells the story of critical ecosystems, threatened wildlife and dedicated conservation efforts by AWA. The power of the people has never been more important to celebrate and ignite so decisions being made are well informed, thoughtful and cognizant of the values we hold as a society today. With less than 2% of our native prairie designated and legally protected, our challenge has been to increase awareness and help decision makers understand the urgency of our present day circumstances. We have taken action on a number of fronts including the critical habitat within the Castle parks; the need for the Bighorn to have formally designated protections; native trout in jeopardy; long overdue caribou range plans; threatened public lands and lack of access for the public; perennial issues for protecting sage-grouse and so many other grassland species; lack of cumulative effects planning; forestry operations based on harvest rather than ecosystem health; tailings pond dams that are not safe; insufficient funds for reclamation and restoration of industrial activities including wind farms, coal mining, oil sands; and a broad based awareness program *Wild Spaces 2020*. While we have focused on these priorities, work and achievements in other areas of concern has continued. As you read this report it will be hard to feel anything but pride in the significant achievements the small team of AWA staff has made. We have remained strong in our messaging on conservation, on the protection of biodiversity and in the power of the people. We cannot achieve what we do without the help members and supporters give every day in terms of their expertise, their time, and their financial resources. We count all of you as part of the AWA team - thank you!



*Stewardship Day on Plateau Mountain, June 2019
AWA Staff and Volunteers made an intrepid team!*



Wild Spaces

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

Wild Alberta Map

AWA uses the names Wild Spaces and Areas of Concern to refer to areas that are critical to a network of protected representative landscapes in Alberta. These areas and the networks they can create are the basis of our Wild Alberta map and in some ways represent a visual strategic conservation plan for AWA.

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

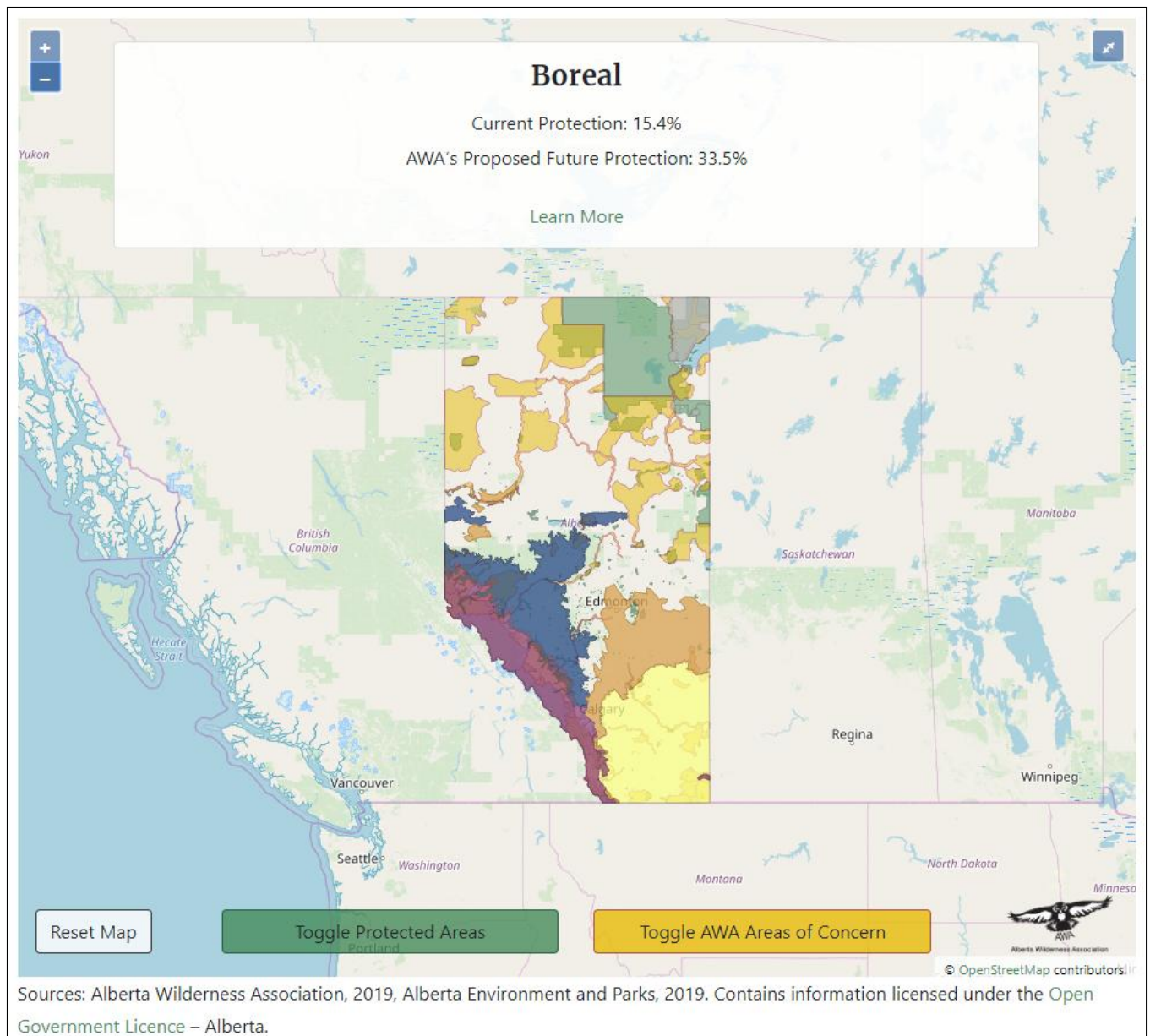
The Wild Alberta Map is shared regularly with colleagues in government, industry, and the environmental field, as well as engaged Albertans, to create a better understanding of critical ecological values and to recognize the significance of Alberta’s natural capital. It is perhaps one of our most effective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

In 2019, the map was redeveloped into an interactive webmap (*The Wild Alberta Interactive Map*) located within AWA’s Wild Alberta webpage. The interactive map is designed to highlight Alberta’s six Natural Regions, the percentage of each Natural Region currently protected, and what it would look like with the increased protections proposed by AWA’s Areas of Concern. The map is highly interactive, allowing users to browse through the Natural Regions, toggle the visibility of the Protected Areas and Areas of Concern, and learn more about Areas of Concern through linked webpages. The map was officially launched on July 30, 2019 and would not have been possible without a dedicated volunteer, Jeff Opekar who worked with open source mapping tools to create the interactive map.

Our *Wild Alberta Map* was updated by Sean Nichols (November 2019) and represents the most recent changes to the protected areas network.

Herb Kariel a geographer and Board of Director emeritus member always reminded us of the value of a map, no matter how simple. When he passed away, Herb left a significant bequest (2017) that means we are able to invest in our mapping tools. We gratefully dedicate our mapping work to his memory.





Alberta's Boreal Natural Region using AWA's *Wild Alberta Interactive Map*



AWA's Wild Alberta map



Areas and Issues of Concern

BOREAL REGION

Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region covers 381,000 km², more than 57 percent of the entire province. A total of 13.2 percent of Alberta's Boreal Natural Region is protected, mostly within the huge Wood Buffalo National Park. But this is not necessarily evenly distributed amongst the eight subregions. Protection ranges from 78.2 percent of the Peace-Athabasca Delta Subregion to 1.6 percent of the Dry Mixedwood Subregion.

Nationally, the Boreal Forest is Canada's largest ecosystem, covering 58 percent of the country. According to the Boreal Forest initiative, an estimated 208 billion tonnes of carbon are stored in Canadian Boreal trees, soils, water and peat - equivalent to 26 years' worth of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions.

Primrose-Lakeland

Primrose- Lakeland is an ecologically rich and diverse area within Alberta's central mixedwood boreal forest. Its diverse land forms, extensive lakes and wetland areas, and significant intact older forests provide important habitat for numerous species of mammals, birds and amphibians. AWA seeks an approved public management plan that prioritizes wilderness protection in the 600 km² of Lakeland Provincial Park and Provincial Recreation Area, both of which were created in the early 1990s. We also seek stronger protection of environmental values across the 6,000 km² Primrose-Lakeland AWA Area of Concern that extends north of Lac La Biche eastwards to Cold Lake.

As part of our work to ensure our native fish populations are managed sustainably, in December 2018 AWA supported the provincial government's decision to adopt a 'catch and release' regime for northern pike in Lakeland Provincial Park lakes, to recover populations that are not currently meeting sustainable harvest fishery objectives.

Cold Lake caribou are one of Alberta's threatened boreal woodland caribou populations. The root cause of the Cold Lake population decline is from excessive habitat disturbance, primarily from unreclaimed seismic lines and other industrial activity. In ongoing engagement with provincial and federal officials this year, AWA continued to advance key solutions for this caribou population: the permanent protection of significant roadless portions of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, as Saskatchewan has already done; a leadership role for Cold Lake First Nations in woodland caribou monitoring, habitat conservation and habitat restoration; and secure long-term funding for caribou habitat actions. In August 2019 we strongly supported a draft agreement between the federal government and Cold Lake First Nations to advance caribou recovery actions.

AWA will be a participant in Alberta's Cold Lake caribou sub-regional planning task force that is commencing in November 2019. AWA will seek a Cold Lake caribou range plan that protects significant areas of the Air Weapons Range, manages other zones within disturbance limits compatible with caribou survival and recovery, and includes significant indigenous leadership and participation. For areas of the defined Cold Lake sub-region that are outside caribou ranges,



we seek a land-use plan consistent with Alberta's commitment under the 1995 Canadian Biodiversity Strategy to maintain ecosystem, species and genetic diversity.

McClelland Lake

The McClelland watershed is located 85 km north of Fort McMurray, at the edge of the mineable oil sands region. It contains one of the largest and most spectacular patterned fens in the province. AWA's vision is for the entire 330 km² McClelland watershed to be designated a Provincial Park, with its two patterned fens designated as Ecological Reserves. McClelland Lake and wetlands are significant natural fresh water bodies along the Lower Athabasca River valley's major North American migratory flyway, providing a stopover area and breeding grounds for many bird species.

The main threat to McClelland Lake wetlands is from potential open pit mining of its upper watershed by Suncor's Fort Hills oil sands mine. This year we learned more about baseline water and wetland monitoring activities in the McClelland watershed. In several stakeholder workshops and meetings, we continued to support the development of an integrated wetlands monitoring component of the federal-provincial oil sands monitoring program.

Contrary to one of its key intended outcomes, Alberta's wetland policy does not protect Alberta's highest value wetlands, such as the McClelland wetland complex. As part of AWA's broader work to strengthen wetlands conservation, we published a September 2018 Wild Lands Advocate article examining how Alberta's wetland policy continues to promote boreal wetland loss.

Wood Buffalo National Park

The Peace-Athabasca Delta, which lies mostly within Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP), is one of the world's largest freshwater deltas, supporting globally significant wildlife populations. The Delta's outstanding universal values are key elements of WBNP's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Canada's largest. In response to a petition by Mikisew Cree First Nation, international investigators with UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2017 found major shortcomings in federal and provincial governments' management of the Peace-Athabasca Delta. Among the findings was a conclusion that cumulative impacts and risks from oil sands and hydroelectric industries to the Peace-Athabasca Delta are not being adequately managed.

AWA continues to collaborate with Mikisew Cree First Nation and other First Nations and ENGOS to encourage strong federal and provincial actions to reduce threats to the Peace-Athabasca Delta. In December 2017 AWA supported a proposed 'buffer zone' protected area south of Wood Buffalo National Park, and welcomed the province's follow-up decision in March 2019 to establish the new Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland Provincial Park. This protected area is a step forward in addressing one of the investigators' concerns. We will continue to collaborate to seek progress on reducing the significant remaining threats to the Peace-Athabasca Delta.

Birch Wabasca

The Birch-Wabasca wilderness, south of Wood Buffalo National Park, is one of the most diverse and relatively intact hill systems in northern Alberta. Its numerous wetlands, shallow lakes and mixedwood tree stands provide valuable wildlife habitat. AWA's vision for Birch-Wabasca is: Wildland Provincial Park designation to be expanded across a greater connected area of Birch-Wabasca; effective buffer zones adjacent to the Parks; and meaningful



limitations on cumulative industrial impacts to lands, wetlands and waters, including the restoration of legacy industrial disturbance that has fragmented significant portions of the region.

AWA welcomed the province's decision in May 2018 to establish the 3,300 km² Birch River Wildland Provincial Park, as well as the modest (16 km²) expansion of Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park. In December 2018, AWA supported Mikisew Cree First Nation and Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation's proposed Roland Lake Biodiversity Stewardship Area (BSA) adjacent to the south border of Wood Buffalo National Park, to achieve habitat protection and restoration of some areas of threatened woodland caribou and wood bison ranges. Kitaskino Nuwenēné Wildland Provincial Park (1,600 km²) was created in a portion of this proposed BSA area in March 2019. AWA praised this decision and continues to seek protection of additional lands envisaged in the BSA proposal.

In 2018-19 AWA discussed with government officials the additional measures needed to realize the potential of these new protected areas, including meaningful indigenous leadership roles in management and monitoring, and a Ronald Lake bison herd management plan. Effective habitat restoration actions and the establishment of limits to access and infrastructure disturbance are also vital to enable woodland caribou to recover in their home ranges within and outside of these parks.

Teck Frontier's proposed open pit tar sands mine near the Athabasca River Valley poses a threat to a portion of this region. In July 2019, a joint federal-provincial review panel recommended that the mine proceed; final approval decisions still remain from the federal government and Teck itself. The joint review panel found that the mine "is likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects to wetlands, old growth forests, wetland- and old-growth-reliant species at risk, the Ronald Lake bison herd, and biodiversity. The project is also likely to result in significant adverse effects to the asserted rights, use of lands and resources, and culture of indigenous groups who use the project area. The proposed mitigation measures have not been proven to be effective or to fully mitigate project effects on the environment or on indigenous rights, use of lands and resources, and culture." AWA will continue to voice concerns about the proposed mine's harmful impacts.

Hay-Zama

The Hay-Zama Lakes complex is a lowland wetland region, encompassing marshes, lakes, swamps, river deltas, woodlands, and wet meadows. In 1982 the region was designated an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971). A portion of the area (486 km²) became a Wildland Park under the Provincial Parks Act in 1999. In addition to providing habitat and a movement corridor for woodland caribou and other ungulates, the complex is used by a diverse complement of waterfowl, shorebirds, and marsh birds. This landscape also provides critical staging and breeding habitat for many migratory bird species. The area is an ecological island in a highly degraded landscape, sitting above a productive oil and gas field that has been actively developed since the 1960's.

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



committee and to ensure that remediation of the Hay-Zama wilderness proceeds on schedule despite the financial challenges.

The Hay-Zama Committee uses a “bottom-up” process for multi-stakeholder collaboration that allows for consensual decision making. AWA promotes the Hay-Zama Committee’s consensus-based, collaborative process as a model for phasing out industrial activities within protected areas because it has effectively demonstrated that economic activities, environmental sensitivities, and cultural priorities can coexist. By assisting the diverse stakeholders work towards resolution through constructive discussion, the committee avoided the necessity for an EUB hearing, with this framework contributing significantly to the early phasing out of petroleum activities from the landscape.

In accordance with the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding on twinning Hay-Zama Lakes with Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) in China, AWA continues to press the Government of Alberta to honour its commitments to the Dalai Lakes Nature Reserve. Staffing issues within the provincial government, related to the remoteness of this Alberta treasure, have made continuity in support and communications with our IMAR colleagues difficult. AWA is encouraged by the government's recent advice that there is and will be consistent staffing resources for Hay-Zama Wildland Park. AWA continues to support the co-management of the wildland park with the Dene Tha’ First Nation, and hopes to see resources allocated to support and train officials.

AWA remains hopeful that we may see a celebration of the Hay-Zama Committee's successes and the end of oil and gas extraction in the complex. It is a long overdue celebration.

Peace River Valley

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

Following the 2015 cancellation of TransAlta’s Dunvegan dam project a group of financiers proposed the Amisk hydro project (AHP) in the summer of 2015. The project proposes a 24 metre high dam across the river about 15 kilometres upstream from the Dunvegan Bridge. This would create a 77 kilometre long headpond, flooding river valley bottom and slopes, including native parkland vegetation areas both inside and outside of the Dunvegan West Wildland Provincial Park. AWA wrote to provincial and federal authorities about the need for federal assessment and a more rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment. The Amisk hydroelectric dam project timelines have been extended and the project will receive a joint federal-provincial review.

In December of 2018, AWA received a letter from the Stakeholder Engagement Lead for AHP Development Corporation. In the letter, AHP indicated that they were not planning to continue the collection of environmental data for the winter of 2018/2019. In personal correspondence with AHP’s Stakeholder Engagement Lead, AWA learned that AHP did not want to further invest



into a long-term project such as Amisk, as it is not feasible without having a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). AHP also indicated their preference to see the project carried forward by means of the Alberta government's Renewable Electricity Program (REP); to date, the REP has shown preferential tendency towards wind and solar project and has yet to accept any bids for hydroelectric projects.

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

In late May of 2019, AWA staff Carolyn Campbell and Nissa Petterson traveled to Peace River and Fort Vermilion to connect with members, colleagues, and grassroots organizations for updates on ongoing land-use and conservation issues, and a chance to explore the area. The first stop on AWA's northern trip was to the proposed location of the Amisk Dam, west of Fairview. Aside from getting an opportunity to take in the majesty of the Peace River and its valley in person, AWA visited a local family for a tour of their recently designated organic farm. The family shared their deep love, history, and knowledge of the land, and their concerns that the Amisk dam could potentially destroy the fragile sandy topography of the landscape, ultimately changing the ecology of the area.

The next stop on the tour was at the town of Peace River to attend the Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance's AGM. AWA learned more about the watershed council's current projects, and what the group plans to prioritize and focus on for the foreseeable future.

AWA's final stop on the northern excursion was to the hamlet of Fort Vermilion, which was hosting many evacuees from High Level and the Dene Tha' First Nation because of nearby wildfires.

AWA's visit to Fort Vermilion focused on connecting with the Hungry Bend Sandhills Society; a local grassroots organization that has long advocated for increased protection and improved land-use management for the sensitive local wilderness. The focal point for the society has been finding solutions to conserving more wilderness in light of the accelerated conversion of native habitat into cropland, and an observed increase in motorized recreation.

AWA's northern road trip was a tremendous opportunity to see firsthand the current land-use practices and demands, in addition to gaining an improved sense of how to best support communities in sustaining ecologically valuable areas. Our experiences and interactions with locals will help shape our approach to advocating and educating the public on how conserving Alberta's northern wilderness has inherent values for all Albertans.

Bistcho

The Bistcho wilderness is a patchwork of mixedwood forests with vast wetland complexes and includes Bistcho Lake, Alberta's third largest lake. The threatened Bistcho boreal woodland caribou population relies upon this landscape and its connectivity to other caribou ranges in



Alberta, NWT and BC. A December 2018 *Wild Lands Advocate* article profiled this relatively remote and ecologically important region.

Bistcho is currently managed as multi-use public land with no protected areas. Historic oil and gas tenures have produced extensive seismic line disturbance, most of which has not been successfully reclaimed. Its sparse commercial forestry prospects mean there is relatively little overlap with industrial forestry tenures. In order to safeguard this irreplaceable landscape, AWA believes that much of the Bistcho should be formally protected as a Wildland Provincial Park, based upon the successful collaborative model with the Dene Tha' First Nation, provincial government and other stakeholders that was used to establish Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Provincial Park in 1999.

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

AWA will be a participant in the Bistcho Lake caribou sub-regional planning task force that is starting in November 2019. AWA will seek a Bistcho caribou range land-use plan that ensures meaningful indigenous leadership and participation, protects significant areas, and manages other areas within disturbance limits that are compatible with self-sustaining caribou. For areas of the defined Bistcho Lake sub-region that are outside caribou ranges, we seek a land-use plan consistent with Alberta's commitment under the 1995 Canadian Biodiversity Strategy to maintain ecosystem, species and genetic diversity.

Chinchaga

With diverse forests and wetlands, the Chinchaga Area of Concern represents a haven of boreal highlands in northwestern Alberta. AWA believes the ecological integrity of the Chinchaga boreal highlands must be maintained and restored to serve as a vital climate refuge for woodland caribou and other boreal forest wildlife. The threatened Chinchaga boreal woodland caribou population relies upon this landscape and its connectivity to adjacent BC caribou range lands. According to the Alberta government, their home range was 97% disturbed by human footprint as of late 2017, mostly from historic seismic line disturbance. Despite the Alberta government's approval of the 2005 Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan and Caribou Policy in 2011, critical caribou habitat continues to be destroyed or degraded by industry activities with the absence of strict surface disturbance limits to minimize impacts to caribou populations.

AWA is seeking solutions to recover Chinchaga's wild spaces and sensitive wildlife while valuing community economic concerns. Extending permanent protection to the P8 Forest Management Unit (FMU) north of the existing 800 km² Chinchaga Wildland Provincial Park would expand the Park fivefold, with no impact to regional forestry and minimal impact to energy leases. The Alberta government committed to this protection in June 2016, and in December 2017 it



proposed this FMU as a candidate protected area, but it has not yet followed through. There could be areas of current and future commercial activity in the caribou range compatible with caribou recovery, where clustering and reducing infrastructure disturbance will be essential. As well, there are new local employment opportunities from reclaiming historic seismic lines and abandoned wells, which would also renew the landscape's capacity to support wildlife, store water and carbon, and be resilient to climate change.

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

Caribou Mountains

Caribou Mountains Wildland Park (5,910 km²) is located just west of Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Alberta. The area contains sensitive wetlands, fragile permafrost, and rare fens and palsas (peaty permafrost mounds containing a core of alternating layers of segregated ice and peat or mineral soil material). The relatively undisturbed, lichen-rich forests provide crucial habitat for an important population of endangered woodland caribou that ranges over almost all of the Wildland Park. The park is also home to wood bison with approximately 120 individuals residing in the Wetzel Lake area. With the exception of Ronald Lake and the Bison Management Area in northwestern Alberta, which contain herds that are disease-free, and classified as endangered under the Wildlife Act, wood bison roaming outside of these boundaries can be hunted year-round. However, hunting of wood bison within Caribou Mountains Wildland Park is prohibited.

Due to the area's isolation, and lack of good biological information, AWA believes the Caribou Mountains are vulnerable to exploitation. The area contains substantial damage from geophysical exploration. Timber harvesting is occurring just outside the Wildland Park along the southern edge of the caribou range, and trapping, hunting, and guiding-outfitting occur in the park. The park's caribou herd has declined by about 75 percent since 1995, (July 2010 ASRD provincial status report) and increased motorized access would further stress this endangered species. If the insulating organic cover is disturbed by human activity, the permafrost beneath can melt, damaging vegetation, soils, and water flow regime.

In 2006 AWA participated in the local advisory committee working to finalize the draft management plan for the Wildland Park and submitted extensive suggestions to support maintaining the area in its relatively undisturbed state. As of August 2019, despite assurances, the draft management plan has still not been produced.

The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2004/5 - 2013/14 notes the area has been severely impacted by fire over the last 20 years, The 2012 federal boreal caribou recovery



strategy noted that 44 percent of the range was disturbed by fire, and 23 percent was disturbed by the logging and energy industries.

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



Primrose Lakeland Area of Concern - Shaw Lake Hike September 2019 © C. Campbell

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Boasting some of Alberta's most iconic landscapes, the Rockies are a critical source of drinking water for Canada's prairies, and home to wildlife such as grizzly bears, native trout, and woodland caribou. AWA believes that the Rocky Mountains must be protected in order to sustain biological diversity and viable wildlife populations, provide clean drinking water across Canada, and support long-term economic and recreational opportunities.

Seeking legislated protection of our Eastern Slopes wildlands and AWA's 1977 submission to the Eastern Slopes Hearings and the *Eastern Slopes Wildlands* book have been some of AWA's most important work defending Alberta's vital landscapes. Some parts of the Eastern Slopes remain with very little real protection and we continue to be engaged throughout the Rocky Mountain Region advocating for legislated protection that considers water, wildlife, and sustainable recreation.

Willmore Wilderness Park

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

The Willmore is dear to the heart of AWA as an example of what wilderness can and should be. There have been battles over continued protection of the area in the past, and constant vigilance is required if protection is to be honoured in the future. That vigilance extends to educating civil servants who seem to place little value on true wilderness in Alberta. There is an ever-present push for fixed roof structures and routes, potentially increasing the degree of recreational access and impact within the park.

Approved and proposed logging operations immediately outside the boundary of the Willmore Wilderness Provincial Park highlight the need for a long-overdue comprehensive management plan for the Willmore. A preliminary management plan was produced in 1980, but never completed or released. A management plan for the Willmore Wilderness Park, as the foundation underlying any future industrial, commercial or recreational developments in the park, is needed. There is a real danger that the many individual small decisions being made about Willmore Wilderness will produce cumulative effects that diminish the wilderness resources that the Willmore Wilderness Act was written to protect.

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

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



Kakwa

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

AWA opposes development on Caw Ridge and will continue to oppose applications for coal mining, and other industrial developments as well as high impact recreation in this sensitive area of wilderness. Coal mining in this area, as in other parts of Alberta, has gone through numerous boom and bust cycles and there have been a number of different operators. Reclamation and restoration of the area of the Grande Cache Coal mine has been problematic.

Grande Cache Coal, the operator of the mine, was acquired by Chinese coal producer Up Energy Development Group Ltd. in 2015. By November 2015, the company closed the mine and laid off 220 employees. Despite hopes of restarting operations in early 2017, Grande Cache Coal declared bankruptcy in February 2017.

CST Canada Coal Company has since purchased the mine, and all permits, licences, leases and approvals have been transferred. The mine began operations mid 2018 and mining of the No. 8 mine surface operation is on-going. AWA met with representatives of CST and GCC in March of 2018 and was able to emphasize outstanding concerns about No. 12 Mine North especially because adjacent Caw Ridge is an important wildlife area that needs to be protected.

Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway southern mountain woodland caribou rely upon the Kakwa landscape and its connectivity to other caribou ranges in Alberta and BC. The winter ranges of these caribou are heavily fragmented by a combination of energy industry surface disturbances and forestry clearcuts. AWA believes that solutions are within reach to protect and restore vital caribou habitat while supporting economic development compatible with self-sustaining caribou. Throughout 2018-19, AWA met and corresponded with federal and provincial officials, seeking meaningful habitat protection to uphold the federal environment minister's May 2018 findings of an 'imminent threat to recovery' of these southern mountain caribou populations. For example, we are requesting that officials ensure forestry tenure holder Weyerhaeuser reduces rather than increase its clearcut area in caribou critical habitat. We are also making this request directly to Weyerhaeuser: we exchanged letters with the company in spring 2019; in June 2019 we attended a Weyerhaeuser meeting with other stakeholders in Grande Prairie to discuss their caribou-related harvest proposals.

AWA will be a participant in the Upper Smoky caribou sub-regional planning task force that is starting up in November 2019 – the 'Upper Smoky' sub-region as defined by the government overlaps with and extends beyond AWA's Kakwa Area of Concern. As a task force member, AWA will seek a caribou range land-use plan that ensures meaningful indigenous leadership and participation, and that protects and manages caribou critical habitat within disturbance limits that are compatible with self-sustaining caribou. For areas of the Upper Smoky sub-region that are outside caribou ranges, we seek a land-use plan consistent with Alberta's commitment



under the 1995 Canadian Biodiversity Strategy to maintain ecosystem, species and genetic diversity.

Little Smoky

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

AWA is working for the long-term protection and restoration of the Little Smoky. We continue to seek strict total disturbance limits and the end of in-range logging. We believe solutions to the fear of economic loss for local communities include: sharing timber allocations outside these small and highly fragmented west central Alberta ranges; clustering energy surface disturbance into a reduced, optimized infrastructure network; and expanding the pilot seismic line habitat restoration to provide local jobs and economic stimulus.

In August 2017, we highlighted local trappers' concerns of extensive new oil and gas disturbance in formerly intact caribou areas, and met in September 2017 with Jupiter Resources to discuss these concerns. In September 2017 we also participated about caribou range discussion panel before a large audience in Whitecourt. On the same visit to the area we also discussed caribou and economic concerns with several Alberta Newsprint Company managers while touring their newsprint facility.

In December 2017, AWA responded to the Alberta Government's release of its draft Provincial Woodland Caribou Range Plan by asking for a government commitment to actually meet minimum caribou habitat needs, and for the government to provide complete site-specific range plans. In February and March 2018, AWA was a delegate to Alberta government multi-stakeholder workshops that discussed potential scenarios for the Little Smoky, A La Peche and other west central ranges.

In October 2018, AWA, in conjunction with the Harmony Foundation and the David Suzuki Foundation, released a commissioned report on how woodland caribou recovery can occur simultaneously alongside economic activity. The report, conducted by natural resource economist Dr. Thomas Michael Power, found that a caribou restoration economy is a feasible solution to maintaining economical activity while promoting the restoration of critical habitat. AWA believes these results are applicable to many different types of landscapes within Alberta that host caribou ranges.

We continue to engage with both provincial and federal decision makers and planners about the need to adopt 'optimized' plans that protect and restore at least the minimum caribou habitat requirements, while seeking cost effective and beneficial solutions to communities. AWA has agreed to participate in three woodland caribou task forces that will develop range plans with a focus on accommodating local economical and social concerns, while advancing the recovery of caribou. The task forces are set to launch in November 2019.

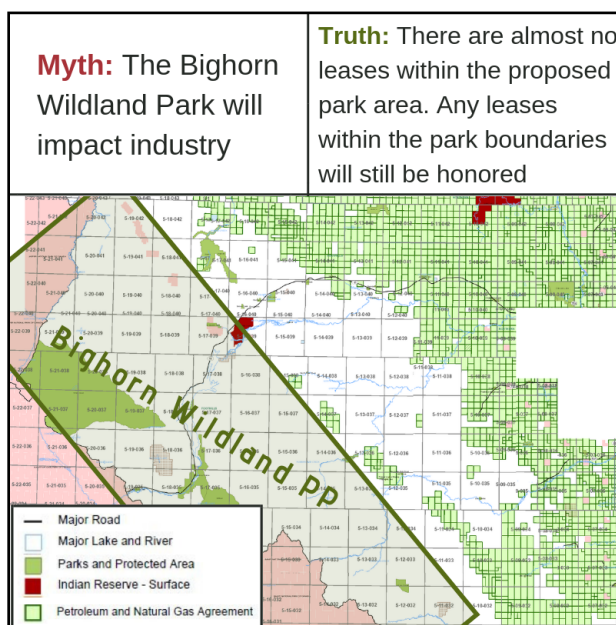


Bighorn

The Bighorn Wildland has been a high priority for AWA since the organization's earliest days in the 1960s. The Bighorn is a large and intact wilderness that retains its ecological integrity due to the absence of roads and industrialized access, yet it remains largely unprotected. The Bighorn Wildland consists of a 5,000 km² pristine wilderness area that AWA proposes would be best protected as a Wildland Provincial Park. Within the Kiska/Wilson Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ) and adjacent public lands east of the Bighorn, AWA would support a number of land use management strategies. These include the establishment of additional PLUZs where none exist, and undertaking associated sub-regional planning initiatives. These would establish motorized and non-motorized trail systems and manage industrial development to a high standard in appropriate areas while protecting critical bull trout spawning areas and other key conservation values.

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

In fall of 2018, the provincial government released a proposal for Bighorn Country, which entailed the protection of the core of the Bighorn wilderness under the designation of a Wildland Provincial Park, while creating an extensive PLUZ east of the Forestry Trunk Road in order to help manage the impacts of multiple recreational uses on the landscape. AWA supported this proposal and participated in the public discourse by publishing information about the proposal on social media, producing fact sheets, speaking to the media, and writing to MLAs. In addition, we encouraged our members to participate in the public consultation period, with over 300 phone calls made to members that would be affected by the proposal.



One example of social media communications used to tackle main sources of misinformation during the Bighorn Country consultation period - © AWA

However, the proposal was never finalized, and following the provincial election in spring of 2019, the new provincial government confirmed it would not implement the Bighorn Country concept, but rather return the management of Bighorn to the North Saskatchewan Regional Planning process.

AWA plans to participate in any new processes or public consultations that unfold with regards to Bighorn, and continues to emphasize the importance of sound public lands management for watershed and wildlife health.

Trail Monitoring

From 2003-2017 AWA made comprehensive visits to the Ram/Clearwater trail system which is designated for off-road vehicle use. With the use of TRAFx monitoring units and ODK data collection system AWA has documented damage to the trail system. Illegal use, fragmentation of this wilderness landscape, impacts on wildlife, and associated erosion and sedimentation from numerous crossings of streams by vehicles has been documented. In 2019, AWA conducted two trips to download data from TRAFx units buried at strategic points along the trail system. The TRAFx units are used to monitor and document the amount of vehicle traffic on the trails. Findings since AWA's last report in 2012 are currently being analyzed and AWA anticipates the release of a final report this year. We know that the topography, soil, and vegetation of the region are not able to withstand motorized recreation.

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

Bighorn Historic Trail

Since 1994, AWA has worked to open and maintain the Historic Bighorn Trail between Crescent Falls on the Bighorn River and the Wapiabi, Blackstone and Chungo Gaps. To our knowledge AWA was the only equestrian group to sign up to maintain a provincial trail when the Forester responsible for the Nordegg, Rocky Mountain House area set up the "Adopt-a-Trail" program in 1994.

AWA had just completed 10 years of cleaning backcountry campsites, most of them old outfitter camps, as well as some seismic exploration camps throughout the Bighorn region, from the Panther River in the south to the Brazeau River in the north. Cleanup trips were 7-10 days long with 4-6 volunteers all riding the Pharis string of pack and saddle horses.

By 1994 all major and most minor drainages had been cleaned, with the Alberta Forest Service flying out the bagged garbage each year. AWA agreed to take on maintenance of the historic Bighorn Trail, re-opening it since it was last cut out in the 1960's. Re-opening took nearly 5 years, with many of the volunteers hiking in to camps supplied by the Dick and Vivian Pharis and their pack string.

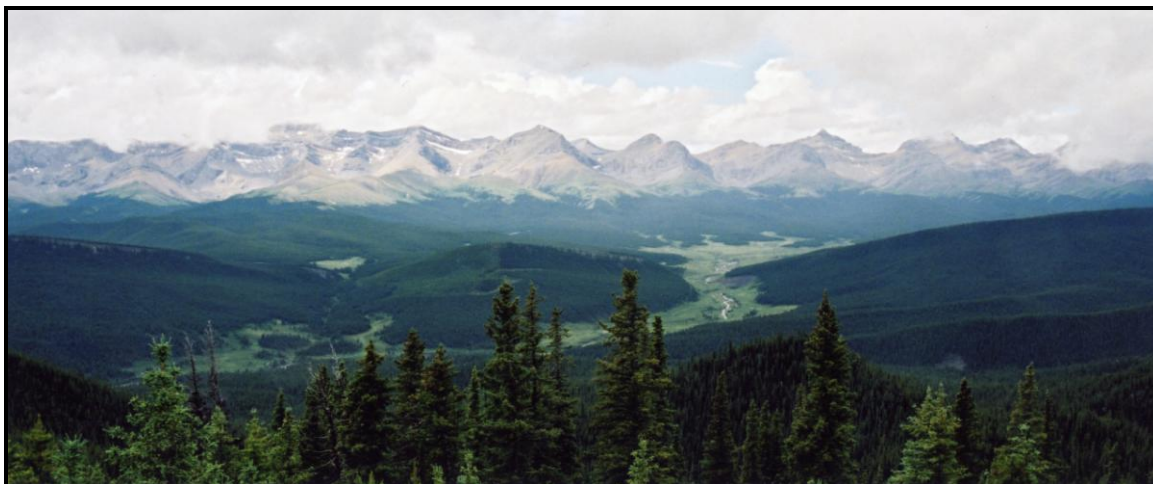
In September 2017, AWA staff and volunteers conducted a five day backcountry trip whose purpose was to undertake maintenance on a three kilometre segment of the trail within the George Greek drainage and to scout other sections for future maintenance. Five participants hiked in from the Blackstone Gap and met up with two others, Vivian Pharis and Norma Ruecker



coming by horse from the Wapiabi Gap. The hiker volunteers were led by AWA's Conservation Specialist, Joanna Skrajny, and included Sean Nichols, Heinz Unger, Nick Pink and Joel VanRiper. Notably, for the first time in 23 years of maintenance work, the participants were assisted by helicopter dropped supplies and tools, courtesy of Alberta Environment and Parks.

AWA confirmed the need to complete reconnaissance work on the remainder of the trail and for a number of reasons a trail maintenance trip was not conducted in 2018. We plan to investigate opportunities to collaborate with other volunteer organizations to continue maintenance of the Bighorn Historic Trail in coming years.

Like the volunteerism we recognize in our *Trail Monitoring Project*, the maintenance work for the *Bighorn Historic Trail* has been totally dependent on volunteers Vivian and Richard Pharis, who worked tirelessly on the trail and provided a string of horses that packed heavy equipment and provided a safe and enjoyable backcountry horse packing experience for all the volunteers. There have been a significant number of volunteers who have been keen to enjoy rustic, physical labour days in the Bighorn Wilderness that have played key roles in opening and maintaining the trail through the years. Early volunteers on these long labour intensive trips included Vivian and Dick Pharis, Dianne Pachal, Sam Gunsch, Verona Goodwin, Dan Olson, Rod Burns and his horses Alex and Rascal, Christyann Olson, Tamini Snaith and in later years, Norma Ruecker, Heather Crone and their horses volunteered on the trail maintenance trips.



The majestic front range greets and inspires Bighorn Historic Trail maintenance volunteers © C. Olson

Bighorn Cleanup Trips

It seems timely to take a look back in this Annual Report at AWA's investment in caring for and seeking protection of the Bighorn area. This story tells about an important part of AWA's culture of people inspired to care. Vivian and Dick Pharis were instrumental in making all of this work possible and for inspiring countless many others to care about and take care of our wild spaces.

AWA organized its first cleanup in the Bighorn Wildland in 1972 at Pinto Lake. In conjunction with 22 members of the Carstairs School Lacrosse team and 4 leaders, AWA members bagged up approximately 2 tonnes of garbage at Pinto Lake. Bow Helicopters donated helicopter time to lift the garbage out to the Banff Jasper Highway and an Alberta Forest Service truck hauled it to the province dump site.



In 1984 AWA began a backcountry cleanup program that ran until 1994 with the Alberta Forest Service. The bulk of the program concentrated on the Bighorn Wildland. Pinto Lake was re-cleaned twice by backpacking volunteers. The Panther Corners became the focus in 1985 of a major cleanup campaign where AWA volunteers bagged up 3 tonnes of garbage. In 1985 a Federal Manpower Grant of \$12,900 was used to hire three students to research and produce a manual on backcountry cleanups.

Between 1972 and 1993 AWA invested cash and in-kind contributions of \$428,600 in cleanup work throughout the Bighorn Wildland. Between 1995 and 1997 under the Adopt A Trail Program AWA invested \$166,000 clearing the trail from Bighorn Flats through to Vimy Creek. A corduroy bridge was built and the trail was cleared through to Wapiabi Pass, and the Blackstone Chungo Gaps.



Bow Helicopters donated services to haul tones of garbage collected by cleanup volunteers at Pinto Lake
© Ray Sloan 1972

SOUTHERN EASTERN SLOPES REGION

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

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

- Reduce the existing road and motorized trail density in Alberta's Eastern Slopes to scientifically defensible levels.
- Ban off-highway vehicles (OHVs) from protected areas in Alberta's Eastern Slopes and from areas identified by the province as *Prime Protection* and *Critical Wildlife Zones*. OHVs represent a land-use incompatible with the purpose of Provincial Parks.
- Permanently close and decommission OHV trails in *threatened* westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat, the destruction of which is illegal under the recently issued Critical Habitat Order.

Decisive actions which prioritize Albertans' health and well-being, and properly value intact and healthy landscapes are long overdue. *Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow* partners, while not engaged in a campaign, will need to continue being tireless in efforts to raise awareness and speak up for responsible land management decisions in Alberta's Eastern Slopes.

South Ghost Wilderness Area - Ghost-Waiparous

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

AWA works with Stop Ghost Clearcut and the Ghost Watershed Alliance Society (GWAS) to increase awareness of the lawless behaviour and unchecked off-highway vehicle (OHV) activity that has become prevalent in the Ghost-Waiparous area. Ghost-Waiparous is only one example of many areas experiencing similar problems throughout the Eastern Slopes' headwaters resulting from uncontrolled OHV use and abuse, illegal firearms and weapons discharge, and a lack of enforcement. AWA believes ecosystem health must be considered first and only then is it appropriate to see where recreation can fit. Vital natural ecosystems, including the security of our headwaters and our watersheds must be protected. The Back Country Trail Flood Rehabilitation Program (BTFRP) work in this region included rerouting motorized recreation trails and building bridges to minimize impacts to westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat. GWAS has engaged experts including Dave Polster to conduct workshops on creating rough and loose barriers on popular river crossing sites and willow staking to stabilize and restore heavily



disturbed areas. The trails themselves contribute increased sediment delivery to streams, habitat fragmentation, and stresses to wildlife; some progress with closure of water crossing areas is being made.

In June 2019, AWA attended GWAS' ENGO stakeholder workshop to review priority recommendations from GWAS' *Ghost River State of the Watershed Report* (2018) and to help identify potential areas of collaboration for ENGOs in the Ghost River watershed.

During the summer of 2019, Spray Lake Sawmills (SLS) began actively flagging the ecologically unique and sensitive Aura Sand Hills, Horse Lake and surrounding wetlands for timber harvest. The Aura Sand Hills have already been heavily eroded by OHV activity. In the coming year, we will continue to monitor SLS' plans to harvest the area and work towards a greater outcome for local ecosystems.

Bow-Canmore Corridor

The Bow-Canmore Corridor is a crucial, yet vulnerable, internationally significant wildlife corridor, connecting wildlife movement from Kananaskis Country to Banff National Park. Over the past few decades there has been significant development in the valley: the Trans-Canada highway, the railroad, and growing human settlements. AWA and environmental colleagues have worked to ensure a viable wildlife corridor. Without an effective corridor for wildlife movement, there is a significant risk of isolating wildlife populations, preventing natural gene flow and harming their sustainability. The trends of increasing development and commercialization in our National Parks and gateway communities such as Canmore are likely to increase pressures on wildlife. Local citizen groups have taken a strong role in defending the wildlife and the need for protection of wildlife corridors. AWA supports them in their work.

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

The possibility of hosting part of the 2026 Olympic Games was negated in 2018 as the bid was not supported by the citizens of Calgary and no further investment in the bid was made. Environmental concerns associated with holding the games in sensitive landscapes have been the focus of AWA's response to potential locations for Olympic Games.

In September 2019, a land-swap took place between MD Bighorn, in which the Bow-Canmore Corridor is located, and the province of Alberta. MD Bighorn exchanged an important five hectare parcel adjacent to the G8 Legacy wildlife underpass for 23 hectares of land east of Exshaw. This swap allowed the government to protect more of the wildlife corridor, while providing MD Bighorn with opportunities to develop the larger, swapped land-parcel.

Kananaskis Country

Kananaskis Country is one of the better known areas of the Southern Eastern Slopes: it has tremendous wilderness value and provides essential habitat for large mammals including



cougar, grizzly bear and numerous ungulates. 2018 marked the 40th anniversary of the designation of Kananaskis Country, a designation that created controversy and tough debate at the time, but today is a jewel that people fiercely defend for its wildness.

AWA's vision for Kananaskis is that further commercial and industrial development, including forestry operations, will be halted until a scientifically-based ecosystem management plan has been developed. Our vision includes the long overdue enhanced designation of Evan-Thomas Provincial Recreation Area as a provincial park and the development of sustainable, small-scale ecotourism economies for Foothills gateway communities. We recognize Kananaskis will reach visitor carrying capacity and it will be very difficult to effectively manage human-wildlife conflict. Ecological integrity will be significantly compromised without plans that consider the ecosystem and wildlife values that make this area so popular. Albertans love and appreciate our protected areas network and protection of the segments of Kananaskis without formal designation is long overdue. Under the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), a number of areas were promised for designation as new or expanded protected areas within Kananaskis Country but have not been implemented.

The 2018-2019 fiscal year was an eventful one for Kananaskis Country. In October 2018, the Silvester Creek Trail in the McLean Creek Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ) was permanently closed; this closure follows years of erosion from nearby roads and motorized trails depositing sediment into the creek, which contains critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout. In November 2018, a concerned citizen pursued legal action against the Province of Alberta and Spray Lake Sawmills over the proposed clearcuts for Kananaskis Country's Mustang Hills. Unfortunately, the judicial review of this case never went through and clearcuts have since been carried out. On November 13, an Olympic plebiscite was held in Calgary to determine if the city would be bidding to host the 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, with many of the activities to be held at Nakiska Ski Area. The bid was rejected after 56.4% of Calgarians voted "no" to hosting the Winter Olympics.

AWA is a steward for Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve in southern Kananaskis Country. Stewardship work includes recording observations, installing signs, and removing debris and garbage. In June 2019, AWA conducted a stewardship trip where two staff, 14 volunteers and an Alberta Parks Ranger visited the site, recorded observations and collect seven large bags of debris. Following the trip, AWA submitted a stewardship report to Alberta Environment and Parks including observations and conservation recommendations.

In July 2019, Fortress Mountain Resort submitted an application to amend their water license so that they may divert 50 million liters per year from Galatea Creek to sell to a Calgary water bottling facility. AWA strongly opposed this application and requested that Fortress Mountain Resort withdraw its proposal. The Bow River, of which the Galatea is a tributary, is already over-allocated for meeting in-stream environmental needs. AWA will continue to follow the proposed water license amendment after the comment period has closed.

AWA supported a study of the sedimentation in McLean Creek with Dave Mayhood and Logan Boyer. The paper *Erosion & Suspended Sediment Delivery from Off-Highway Vehicle Trails & Roads in the McLean Creek Watershed, Alberta* has had a peer review and as of October 2019 is in final stages with hopes that it will soon be submitted for publication. The study, supported with funding from Bow River Basin Council concluded that OHV trails and the McLean Creek Road create sufficient total suspended solids (TSS) to seriously harm fish populations, even to



the extent of eliminating some of them. The report suggests that TSS loading to the Elbow River by McLean Creek, largely attributable to OHV trails and roads, is sufficiently high to warrant further investigation to determine its effects on downstream water quality and treatment. The government needs to deal with the outstanding problem of motorized recreationists crossing streams and creating trails that deliver large amounts of sediment to streams. The findings of this research will and have already helped increase knowledge of the issues.

Castle Wildland Park and Castle Provincial Park

Since the September 2015 announcement of the Castle Parks, a great deal of committee work and consultation has led to the development of the management plan given approval in May 2018. AWA believes the final Castle plan reflects concerns raised in the consultation process and the wishes of Albertans to see this region protected. The plan commits to the phase-out of summer off highway vehicle (OHV) use in the parks. In July 2019, with 132 km of trails remaining in the Castle Parks, the Government of Alberta decided to halt trail closures to reassess the suitability of trails within the area. AWA strongly supports holding to the commitment to phase out all trails within the Castle Parks, as the area contains critical habitat for threatened westslope cutthroat trout and grizzly bears. AWA met with the Minister of the Environment to discuss management of the Castle on July 31, 2019. We currently await a decision by the Minister on how motorized recreation in the Castle Parks will be managed.

AWA continues to be concerned about the plan's commitment to the ongoing use of snowmobiles in the park, stating "because of the relatively lower impact of winter OHV use, this activity will be permitted." Our reviews of this activity suggest significant impacts remain. Winter is a particularly stressful time for many animals as they cope with lower food availability and higher metabolic demands. Snowmobiles can cause increased stress levels as well as displacement and changes in animal behaviour. The final concerns surround ensuring these parks retain and protect the wilderness values that make them so special. Responsible grazing practices, restoration of areas damaged through industrial and recreational use and avoidance of the commercialization of these parks are the focus of AWA's concern going forward.

Livingstone-Porcupine

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

The Porcupine Hills Coalition formed in 2015 by concerned individuals, organizations (including AWA) and municipalities has expanded to include 40 signatories. The Coalition agreed by consensus on a Statement of Principles that guides its work and ultimately aims to guide the work of the planning process. These principles include the recognition of watershed protection and biodiversity as primary objectives, using an integrated approach that considers adjacent private land and the visions of land stewardship organizations. The Coalition met regularly with government planners throughout the process of developing the Land Footprint Management Plan (LFMP) and Recreation Management Plan (RMP), both released in spring 2018. These final plans require various ministries, industries, and decision-makers to co-operate and achieve better public lands management. The creation of two new Public Land Use Zones (PLUZs), one in the Livingstone and another in the Porcupine Hills, added important enforcement strength to the plans. The establishment of PLUZs provides designated trail systems for off-highway vehicles, along with clear guidance for both motorized and non-motorized users. It also provides



enforcement officers with the tools to better enforce regulations governing illegal activities on these lands.

Not all of AWA's concerns are addressed in the final plan. Notably, despite AWA's concerns, the motorized trail system crosses westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat in a number of locations. These trails will contribute to the continued degradation of critical habitat since the runoff from the trail system allows significant amounts of additional sediment into creeks. As AWA has noted time and time again, the destruction of critical habitat is illegal under the Species at Risk Act. We believe strict avoidance of critical habitat is required to honour the government's legal obligation to recover westslope cutthroat trout. As the implementation phase of the LFMP and RMP begins, Alberta Environment and Parks has assembled a secondary group of stakeholders to advise on trail planning within the PLUZs. The group, the Recreational Advisory Committee (RAC), is composed of conservation and recreational stakeholders.

Land use planning continues in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills with the development of the Spatial Human Footprint Targets (SHF); completion of the SHF and an Eastern Slopes Restoration Strategy are required within one year of the release of the LFMP. As of May 2019, the Government of Alberta has officially surpassed this one year deadline. The SHF is urgently needed to manage the cumulative impacts of human footprint (including clearcuts and former coal mines) on the landscape. Before the SHF can be developed, the government must first complete the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan's Biodiversity Management Framework (BMF), which is currently four years late.

In June 2019, the Brooks Motocross Club was fined \$70,000 for habitat destruction as a result of a motocross race that took place in Racehorse Creek in August 2014. The motocross club was found guilty under the *Species at Risk Act* and the *Fisheries Act* for crossing North and South Racehorse Creeks several times, seriously harming and causing the death of young bull trout and threatened westslope cutthroat trout. This decision was important, as it recognized the importance of Alberta's threatened native trout species and reinforces that we are all responsible for their protection and recovery.

The proposed new Grassy Mountain Coal Mine is located within AWA's Livingstone-Porcupine Area of Concern and AWA continues to be involved with the review of this proposed project (see Energy – Coal for further information).



Lillian Lake, Kananaskis and a perfect September Backpack trip - © G. Wark



PARKLAND REGION

The Parkland Natural Region is 60,747 km² in size, encompassing 9.2 percent of Alberta. As the transition between grasslands and forests, the Parkland is exceptionally diverse in both landscapes and vegetation. Unfortunately, the Parkland is also the most populated containing the municipalities of Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton and has extensive agricultural development. With only 5 percent of the Region's natural vegetation remaining, AWA believes that increased protection of the Parkland Natural Region is urgently needed, which would include a halt to new surface disturbances and the sale of public lands, in addition to the protection of public lands that contain native Parkland habitat.

Waterton Parkland

The Waterton Parkland area consists mostly of private land to the east of Waterton Lakes National Park. The area is part of the Foothills Parkland Ecoregion. Rough fescue grasslands and trembling aspen groves characterize the region. Increasingly, landowners in this region are looking for and implementing ways to minimize the impacts of development on this landscape, as well as developing programs to minimize conflicts with wildlife. In June 2019, Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC) announced a new conservation easement for the Hansen Ranch, protecting over 900 acres of parkland habitat. The new conservation easement ensures that the landscapes within the Hansen Ranch will be managed sustainably, with provisions to ensure that if sold, the Ranch will never be subdivided and the wetlands within the area will never be drained.

AWA supports local landowners and conservationists in the region. Letters of support for landowners opposed to expanding developments and incursion into wild landscapes in the area have been written to local municipalities.

Rumsey

Lying in the transition between the southern grasslands and the northern boreal forest, Rumsey is a mosaic of trembling aspen woodland, fescue grassland, and wetland habitats. Aspen parkland once stretched over 255,000 km² in the Prairie Provinces. In Alberta, the Central Parkland Natural Subregion sweeps in a wide arc from Airdrie to north of Edmonton, and east to Lloydminster and Provost. Today, the Rumsey Natural Area and Ecological Reserve (together, the Rumsey Block) are surrounded by a checkerboard of cropland and islands of native vegetation. Rumsey remains as the only large and relatively undisturbed area of aspen groveland on a landscape of hummocky disintegration moraine in the world. It represents a landscape that is almost extinct and provides a valuable ecological benchmark.

Progress has been made on the protection of Rumsey Natural Area from continuing industrial disturbance. As of February 29, 2012, all new petroleum and natural gas agreements within the Rumsey Natural Area include the provision that "Surface Access is Not Permitted." For AWA, this was an encouraging first step in the long-term phase out of oil and gas activity in the Natural Area.

AWA reviewed a long-awaited confidential draft of a management plan for Rumsey in 2015, and continues to ask for the draft to be released for public consultation as soon as possible. There has been no explanation provided for the delay and the lack of a management plan for Rumsey, which could inevitably see the loss of its remaining intact native features.



As of August 2019, there are 103 wells sites within the Rumsey Natural Area. The last well was drilled in August 2006:

- Abandoned: 10
- Dry and Abandoned: 65
- Gas (producing): 14
- Suspended: 6
- Unassigned: 4

Complications for successful reclamation of Rumsey include: ballooning numbers of orphaned wells within the province, current provincial initiatives to restructure the Alberta Energy Regulator, and reclamation certificates being issued by the AER without consultation from Alberta Environment and Parks staff.

Grazing leaseholders were authorized to mechanically clear aspen encroachments in the northwest block of the Ecological Reserve. AWA believes that the reintroduction of natural methods to address aspen encroachment, such as prescribed fire would be more appropriate to address these concerns. AWA visited Rumsey this summer for a field tour with Cheryl Bradley and everyone enjoyed an excellent day.

Parkland Dunes

With rolling hills of native grasses interspersed with lush aspen groves, peatlands, and vibrant wetlands, the Parkland Dunes is an oasis in an otherwise agriculture-dominated landscape. Located in east-central Alberta, southeast of the Town of Wainwright, the Parkland Dunes is approximately 932 km² in size, and contains a small protected area, the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve, which is 28 km² in size. Management of the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve is led by Alberta Parks, but is also guided by the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve Advisory Committee. AWA serves on this advisory group for the Wainwright Dunes, which monitors the implementation of the management plan that was approved in 1999 for this nationally significant parkland sand dune and wetland wilderness.

In Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve, there has been a noted absence of fire, with the last recorded fire in the 1980s. As a result, shrub encroachment has been substantial and has contributed to the “squeezing out” of native species associated with the grasslands and dunes ecosystems, including a decrease in sharp tailed grouse. Concerns about managing aspen encroachment in the Ecological Reserve have been voiced for years with little decision-making or action taken. There is also some anecdotal evidence that elk populations continue to grow in the protected area and on surrounding lands, with concerns that they may outstrip the capacity of the area in the near future.

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



GRASSLANDS REGION

The northernmost extent of the Great Plains, Alberta's Grasslands Natural Region is one of the most diverse and least protected regions in the province. AWA's vision for the grasslands is to conserve the full biodiversity of the Grassland Natural Region and establish large contiguous areas of native grassland that are protected in perpetuity both for their intrinsic value and for the benefit of present and future generations.

Alberta's track record for protecting the Grasslands Natural Region remains abysmal: less than 2 percent of our overall grasslands, and less than 1 percent of the Foothills Fescue and Mixedgrass Natural Subregions have any legal protective designation. These levels are far below the global 12 percent protected areas target recommended by the 1987 Brundtland Commission (formally known as the World Commission on Environment and Development) which set protected areas targets as part of achieving sustainability. In a letter from the Government of Alberta in November 2018, the former Minister of the Environment disappointingly stated Alberta's target for protection in these regions is only 5 percent even though Canada and Alberta have committed to Target 11 of the IUCN Aichi Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (2011-2020). The commitment requires that at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas be conserved by 2020. Canada's commitment also promises that "areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, will be conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes". AWA is working to ensure this commitment can be upheld to benefit our vitally important native grasslands.

The Northern Great Plains ecoregion has been identified as a global priority for conservation and protection as one of the World Wildlife Fund's Global 2000 ecoregions. Temperate grasslands are the biome most at risk in the World. Birds that nest in temperate grasslands are the most rapidly declining group of birds in North America. Large, relatively undisturbed blocks of native grassland are few in Alberta. Much of the native grassland is fragmented or degraded and although native grasslands are only currently about five percent of Alberta's land base, they support approximately half of the rare ecological communities, 40 percent of rare vascular plant species and 70 percent of mammal, bird, reptile and amphibian species considered "at risk" or "may be at risk". The remaining large blocks of native grassland are extremely significant for biodiversity conservation and their protection is essential.



Middle Sand Hills

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

A large portion of the Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern lies within the boundaries of the Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Suffield military reserve. As such, the military is intricately tied to the history, and fate of this wildland. Since 1971, the Department of National Defence has recognized the fragility of the area and has zoned the eastern part of the base out-of-bounds for military training. AWA would like to see increased protection and more ecologically sensitive management of the larger Middle Sand Hills Area of Concern and would like to be engaged in a management planning process.

Suffield National Wildlife Area

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

There are still diverse views on elk population impacts on the NWA and on adjacent cattle grazing areas. In general, AWA is neither in favour nor opposed to an elk hunt at Suffield NWA, provided it is done on foot and the need to control the numbers of elk is clearly demonstrated. The situation at Suffield is somewhat complicated as historical predators of elk, e.g. grizzly bear and wolf, no longer roam the military base area. AWA would support the reintroduction of predators to the NWA as a natural measure of population control.

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

Milk River-Sage Creek

The 5,000 km² Milk River-Sage Creek Area of Concern in the grasslands of southeastern Alberta comprises three main units:

- Cypress Hills - a montane outlier with forests and lush fescue grasslands;
- Pakowki Lake - an area of sandhills and a large 'playa' (meaning a flat, often dry basin) lake that is very productive for waterfowl and shorebirds in wetter years;



- The balance of the area, including the Milk River Canyon and associated badlands as well as some of the most extensive native mixed grassland, silver sagebrush and ephemeral wetland habitat in Canada.

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

Re-fencing initiatives to help improve pronghorn antelope passage through the Milk River-Sage Creek area have been hosted by Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA) and involved removing the barbed wire fencing in the area and replacing it with smooth wire with the lower strand 18" above the ground. As pronghorns cannot jump they go under fencing, making barbed wire particularly dangerous. The re-fencing events are successful, and help demonstrate how human land-use decisions impact wildlife and their migration. AWA volunteered on a 2017 re-fencing project.

Cypress Hills

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

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

Pakowki Lake

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

None of the Pakowki Lake Area of Concern has provincial or federal protected status, although a portion is designated as a game bird sanctuary. Pakowki Lake is designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) through the BirdLife International IBA program. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified Pakowki Lake as a Category IV Habitat/Species Management Area, meaning it should be managed mainly for conservation of habitats and



biodiversity. The Pakowki sandhills are public land held under grazing lease; some cultivation has taken place on adjacent parcels of privately owned land.

AWA believes Pakowki Lake should be formally recognized for its national environmental significance with legislated provincial protection. Unfortunately, while the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) identifies this area for future grassland conservation, it is unlikely to prohibit new industrial development.

Milk River Ridge

This area is known for its sensitive foothills grasslands, productive wetlands and the only open plains habitat for Grizzly Bears in Alberta. Oil and gas development in the Alberta Bakken is surrounding the few remaining intact patches. The local leaseholders want protection under Heritage Rangeland designation, which AWA strongly supported during the SSRP regional planning process. The government has recognized the area needs protection in the SSRP and yet incredibly, continued to approve applications for new oil development in this sensitive area.

Since 2015, AWA engaged repeatedly with government departments and the Alberta Energy Regulator to seek restrictions on industrial development and advance formal protected area status. Our efforts were completely frustrated by Alberta Energy's renewal of Granite Oil Corp.'s subsurface leases in June 2018 and the dispute about prohibiting surface access. In October 2018, the Alberta Energy Regulator announced that there would be a hearing to determine whether or not Granite Oil's application for surface access would be approved. However, in December 2018, Granite withdrew their lease application.

Late 2018 brought forward promising changes with Alberta Environment and Parks proposing to expand and re-designate the Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area. The proposal included expanding the protected area by 3,173 hectares and re-designating it as a Heritage Rangeland; the Heritage Rangeland status would offer improved protection for grasslands and acknowledges grazing as an integral part of grassland ecology. While public consultation showed significant public support for the proposed changes, the expansion and re-designation never reached cabinet. AWA will continue to pursue the expansion and re-designation.

Milk River Management Committee

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

The decision to form the MRMS and create a lease for the area came out of the management planning process in the 1980s. As part of its mandate, the MRMS is responsible for administering the grazing contract and long-term research monitoring, which has been ongoing since the early 1990s. This region is perhaps the longest continuously monitored grassland site in the province for native vegetation and wildlife. Renewal of the lease has been stalled in government channels, and was expected before year end 2017 - we are still waiting. Recent correspondence about the lease is encouraging and the process may be moving forward.



During the last 3 years, the MRMS has undertaken experimental grazing on the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve (KCER) to study the effects of grazing on attempts to reduce invasive and non-native plant species. In the summer of 2017, 2,500 hectares were burned in three fires caused by lightning strikes. One started in the Pinhorn area to the west of KCER. The second started in Montana just south of KCER. Cattle were removed safely escaping the fire from the south. The entire KCER and the southern third of the Milk River Natural Area were burned. An inspection tour of the burned area by MRMS occurred in the spring of 2018. Repairs to fencing damaged by the fire are ongoing and despite this work being a shared responsibility the government has not helped and the MRMS is bearing the cost of the work being done..

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

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

Prairie Conservation Forum

The Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) is a voluntary coalition of stakeholder groups whose members are interested in the conservation of native prairie and parkland environments in Alberta. It is a common platform to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and promote conservation of these environments. PCF was established by the Government of Alberta in 1989 to convey support and commitment to implementing the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP). A PCAP is a five year blueprint for conserving, protecting and managing native prairie and parkland species, communities and habitats. The process was initiated by the World Wildlife Fund, Canada and the provincial governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta to offer a comprehensive vision for the preservation of Canada's prairies. Developing and renewing the current PCAP is one of the main roles of the PCF. The current PCAP was released January 2016 and will be applicable until 2020.

AWA played a significant role in archiving PCF historic documents this year. All paper files were organized, digitized and stored electronically with access for PCF executive and coordinators. All important historic paper documents are now stored within the AWA Wilderness Resource Library.

PCF meetings are an important way to meet with representatives from many different interests and perspectives; Alberta's PCF has almost 50 members. Members represent agricultural groups, conservation groups, land and resource management organizations, federal and provincial agencies, local and regional authorities and service agencies, industry, academia, and individuals. Member updates are helpful to learn about the work of different groups. Not every member has the same objectives but everyone is at the table for a common goal – native prairie and parkland conservation. AWA's executive director Christyann Olson was nominated to the PCF Board for a two year term in 2018. The work concentrated on has been to achieve PCAP objectives related to connectivity within the prairie and parkland regions. A coordinating committee has moved forward with an experts workshop and implementation of the outcomes will be part of the work achieved in the coming year.



Grassland Restoration Forum

Foothills Restoration Forum (FRF) promotes the conservation and restoration of native grasslands in Alberta through education, outreach and research to improve reclamation practice and foster stewardship. The FRF changed its name to Grassland Restoration Forum (GRF) this year. The forum began in 2006 as collaboration between members of provincial agencies, the ranching community, conservation organizations, industry, plant ecologists and reclamation practitioners. AWA has been a member of the Technical Advisory Committee of the FRF in the past and attends meetings of the forum. The multi-stakeholder group is focused on best practices for restoring fescue grasslands. The GRF provides the opportunity for informed debate and discussion. In November of 2018, AWA attended the fall forum where presentations to the multi-stakeholder audience focused on methods towards coexistence with wildlife, reclamation of public lands, wetland classification and restoration, adaptive management for ranchers on grazing leases, and a suggested approach to the ecological restoration of high elevation montane grasslands. AWA continues when appropriate to distribute the document *Minimizing Disturbance of Alberta's Native Prairie by Wind Energy Development* developed as part of our work with the FRF.



Milk River Ridge - Fields of Lupines and an amazing 360 degree vistas © C. Olson

WATER

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

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

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

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

AWA continues to chair the Alberta Environmental Network's Water Caucus. Through its monthly calls and other meetings, the Caucus is a forum for Alberta ENGOs to discuss emerging and ongoing water issues. In February 2019, Alberta Environment and Parks' Director of Watershed Sciences presented to Water Caucus on provincial water monitoring activities, including plans to expand North Saskatchewan watershed tributary monitoring. Water Caucus reviewed the findings of a 10-year review of approved water management plans for the Oldman, Bow and Red Deer rivers that was led by the Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) in these watersheds.

A highlight of AWA's water activities this year was attending the July 2019 Keepers of the Water gathering in Wabasca. Co-hosted by the Bigstone Cree First Nation, this event was an opportunity to learn from people who are witnessing an overwhelming pace of industrial development, which is re-shaping the places that are central to their identity and way of life. Some of these communities are also still struggling to achieve secure water quality and quantity conditions that most Albertans take for granted.

AWA staff traveled through much of Alberta's Peace River Valley in spring 2019, including the Fairview, town of Peace River and Fort Vermilion regions, to renew and expand our connections with stewardship groups and landowners.

In the Bow watershed, AWA continues to monitor proposals for major diversions and dams upstream of Calgary. AWA believes that the primary strategy for flood mitigation for Calgary and surrounding communities should not be on-stream dam infrastructure, but rather upstream land use improvements, and strictly limiting the future establishment of commercial, industrial, residential developments within the floodplain of the Bow River.

In the Red Deer River watershed, AWA is watching the Special Areas water pipeline proposal. This proposal is to build a 100 kilometre long water pipeline to divert water from the Red Deer River and pump it eastward. The water uses would be for livestock and to convert ecologically vital grasslands stream corridors to irrigated tame pasture. The government's cost estimates are \$410 million for construction and \$5.5 million annual operating costs. AWA does not see a need to pipe water for non-household use to arid regions of the province. We are also very concerned that the government so far has declined to assess the environmental impacts of irrigation or grazing scenarios directly attributable to this project.



The Alberta government released a new Surface Water Allocation Directive for public comment in October 2018. AWA participated in an information session and provided generally supportive comments. AWA believes this directive is a positive step forward for placing some limits on water allocations in rivers and lakes in central and northern watersheds, where there generally are no other water conservation objectives. The directive came into effect in March 2019.

In July 2019, AWA learned that Fortress Mountain ski hill is proposing to change part of a water license it was issued in 1968 for potable water for its ski business. It wants to remove 50 million litres per year of water flowing into Kananaskis' Galatea Creek and truck it downstream to a Calgary bottling facility, to be marketed for its 'purity'. Bow River water resources are limited and AWA strongly opposes this poor water re-allocation idea. Many AWA members and other concerned Albertans wrote to elected officials, regulators and to Fortress' management to state their strong opposition to this water use proposal.



Galatea Creek - plans to sell and truck water for bottling sets dangerous precedence for mountain streams © C. Campbell

Wetland policy

AWA continues to work towards a clear 'no net loss' wetland policy that a strong majority of Albertans supported in the last extensive public consultations conducted on the issue, in 2007. Wetlands are vital ecosystems for wildlife habitat, carbon storage, water purification, and drought and flood buffering. This year we had the opportunity to raise concerns about ongoing wetland loss with government monitoring and policy officials in various settings, including: oilsands monitoring work (further described in the Energy section), at a spring 2019 academic forum, and in discussion with government officials on cumulative effects management, biodiversity monitoring and wildlife management.

The September 2018 issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate* featured Mai-Linh Huynh's article examining Alberta's policy towards wetlands in the 'Green Area' of forested public lands, which make up 58 percent of the province. Her report described the exemptions that the oil sands industry has received from the government's 2013 wetlands policy. She outlined many other significant policy gaps that continue to promote the loss of Alberta's valuable boreal and foothills wetlands.

In spring 2019, AWA also welcomed a proposal from guest author Taylor Bujaczek to write an analysis of Alberta's wetland policy in the 'White Area', or settled area of Alberta. This analysis was published in the September 2019 *Wild Lands Advocate*. Taylor noted the positive evolution of wetland restoration programs. She also emphasized the need for ongoing education about wetland values for agricultural producers and other sectors, and encouraged stronger mechanisms to document how project proponents are avoiding and minimizing wetland loss.

Water for Life

Alberta's 'Water for Life' strategy has three goals: safe, secure drinking water supply; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. AWA continues to seek progress to improve aquatic ecosystem health, which has lagged behind the other two goals.

The multi-sector Alberta Water Council provides advice to the Alberta government on implementing Water for Life goals. AWA is one of the Environmental Sector Board members of Council. Together with our ENGO colleagues, this year we expressed concerns about inadequate outcomes for advancing aquatic ecosystem health and we proposed suggestions on how the Water Council could increase the uptake by government of Council's consensus-based environmental recommendations. We also reviewed Water Council Team recommendations on drinking water source protection.

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) are the key regional partnerships of the Water for Life strategy. AWA is a member of most WPACs. In 2018-19 we attended the AGMs of the Mighty Peace Watershed Association, Red Deer River Watershed Alliance and Bow River Basin Council.



Mamawi Lake, near Fort Chipewyan © CCampbell

FORESTS

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

Alberta's boreal and Eastern Slopes forests continue to be managed with a timber-centric philosophy. Policies need to place greater emphasis on forests as vital ecosystems and habitat, providing carbon storage, purification of water and air, water storage and the related buffering of floods and drought. Healthy forests mean healthy wildlife and healthy communities, they are inextricably linked.

AWA has supported local communities and watershed groups to strengthen their advocacy against unsustainable levels of land use including industrial development, clear cut logging and off-highway vehicle abuse in the Eastern Slopes. There are two major themes we commonly see and hear about: a failure to manage forests for their many non-forestry values, and a lack of meaningful public involvement in management decisions. Joining forces with many other individuals and groups seeking an ecosystem-based approach to forest management has helped influence some decision making processes, although much more change is needed.

These issues persist into 2019; however, the series of informal conversations we have held with the Forest Tenure, Trade and Policy (FTTP) branch of Alberta Agriculture & Forestry since 2017 have provided a venue for collaboration and an opportunity to be heard. Conversations with FTTP staff will continue into the 2019-20 planning cycle.

Fish and Forests Initiative

In 2011, AWA's discussions with community members about how to advance inclusive and ecosystem-based forest management in the southern foothills led AWA to form the Fish and Forests Forum. For the past nine years we have continued to lead the Fish and Forests Forum as a collaborative and workshop-based way to bring together experts for constructive exchanges of ideas. Various local groups, scientists, ENGOs and other members of the public concerned about issues related to forests meet two to three times each year, in order to share information, focus efforts and prioritize actions around improving forest management and protecting forest values. There are now more than 25 individuals and groups who participate. The scope of concern comprises the forests across the province and the watersheds in those forests.

AWA hosted three Fish and Forests roundtables in the past year, in September, December and June. At the September and December Fish and Forests roundtables, officials from the Forest Tenure, Trade and Policy (FTTP) branch of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry discussed current forest tenure-related policies and comment opportunities. Follow up with the government for a thoughtful response to the groups' concerns and requests will be ongoing.

Throughout the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the Fish and Forests' 'Working Group' investigated various opportunities to improve the policies, regulations and standards that direct forest management in Alberta. In December 2018 the Working Group was recognized by FTTP as a targeted ENGO stakeholder group for informal policy discussions. Items discussed with FTTP in the past year included: opportunities for further transparency in Forestry division information, an overview of Forestry's involvement in Integrated Resource Management System and review of the Timber Management Regulation and Timber Export Policy. We anticipate upcoming



discussions with FTTP on forestry implications of the new provincial government's 'Red Tape Reduction' strategy.

FSC Canada

AWA is an active member and participant in Forest Stewardship Council Canada (FSC Canada) activities, including recent coordination with other ENGO FSC members that worked on the new National Forest Management Standard for Canada. For the past six years, AWA was one of two ENGOs represented on the Standard Development Group which developed the final standard that was submitted to and approved by FSC International. Key issues for the Standard Development Group included high conservation value forests, protected areas, intact forest landscapes, caribou, and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for Indigenous Peoples. The new National Forest Management Standard for Canada was approved in June of 2019 and will be effective as of January 2020. AWA's Cliff Wallis is a Director on the Forest Stewardship Council (Canada) Board as one of two environmental chamber representatives.

In September 2018, AWA and Al-Pac were represented at the third FSC Boreal Forest meeting in Tallinn, Estonia where discussions continued on Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs). There was controversy over a "sustainable intensification" concept, an approach that AWA believes will not find much uptake in Canada.

In June 2017, AWA and other ENGO colleagues raised concerns with auditors about timber sourced in Alberta's west central foothills being re-certified under the FSC Canada's Controlled Wood standard. We believed that the company-conducted risk assessments did not reflect the high conservation values at risk from ongoing logging, including threatened woodland caribou populations. Since 2016, FSC Canada has facilitated a number of consultation opportunities to create a National Risk Assessment standard for a consistent, credible application of Controlled Wood designations. A new Controlled Wood National Risk Assessment was finalized in June 2019 that better reflects conservation risks; AWA will watch for a timely transition by certificate holders to the new Assessment requirements.



Central Mixedwood Forests; Primrose Lakeland Area of Concern © AWA Files

ENERGY

AWA believes that energy exploration and development must be regulated in a manner that is consistent with the maintenance of wilderness values. AWA's mandate throughout its five decades has been the protection of intact, representative ecosystems across Alberta. In areas where economic development is integrated within a working landscape, AWA supports robust management, regulation, and enforcement strategies. Collectively, we know that the economic value of the ecosystem services performed by natural ecosystems for humankind far exceeds that of industrial development.

Conventional Oil and Gas

The cumulative density of seismic lines, roads, pipelines and other energy-related disturbance on Alberta public lands, including within species-at-risk habitat, is still largely uncontrolled and escalating. An exception is in identified sage grouse habitat where federal emergency protection orders apply.

AWA believes that responsible energy development must occur within overarching environmental policies, targets and legislation. We believe that the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) must begin to apply science-based cumulative effects thresholds for land disturbance and biodiversity, including for species at risk, in both its project-by-project and area-based regulatory decisions.

In 2018-2019, AER appeared to have virtually halted efforts to assure responsible Cumulative Effects Management (CEM). In a meeting with AWA and other Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) members in April 2018, AER senior managers affirmed that CEM was a priority for its Science and Evaluation Branch. However, in a follow-up April 2019 meeting, AWA and other AEN members learned from senior AER managers that no further updates were available on AER's CEM policy Framework, on the development of a cumulative impacts water-land integrated approvals modelling tool, or on any CEM pilot projects. These had all been previously described as key CEM actions. AWA will continue to seek AER actions to address continuing harmful cumulative environmental impacts from energy development.

Oil Sands Monitoring

In 2013-2016, AWA was an Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) delegate to the Terrestrial Biodiversity committee, one of several multi-sector advisory committees of the joint federal-provincial Oil Sands Monitoring (OSM) program. This gave us insights into research and monitoring activities, and helped us to advance lagging areas, including wetlands monitoring. 2017-18 was a re-organizing period for OSM. In December 2017, the OSM federal-provincial governments' agreement was renewed. In November 2018, a positive new OSM governance framework was finalized that included significantly greater Indigenous participation at all levels.

AWA and AEN colleagues requested a clear ongoing ENGO role in OSM activities. AWA views this as an important pathway for ENGOs to help evaluate and reduce cumulative impacts to vulnerable old-growth forests, peat wetlands and waters in the oil sands region. In December 2018 AEN delegates were chosen for the first two Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) under the new governance structure. TAC members provide advice on monitoring and evaluation activities to date and review new work plans. AWA is the AEN delegate for the 'Terrestrial Biological' TAC, which met twice in the first half of 2019. Through the AEN Water Caucus, we are



also informed of the Groundwater TAC activities. Four new OSM Technical Advisory Committees will be established in late 2019.

Oil Sands Mine Financial Security Program

AWA believes that major reforms of Alberta's Mine Financial Security Program for oil sands are needed. Currently there is unacceptably high risk that the public will be stuck with multi-billion dollar costs of managing toxic abandoned tar sands mines and tailings sites. Alberta should require detailed liability disclosure by oil sands mines, and should quickly transition to requiring operators to post full financial security to match their incurred liabilities. This would spur timely, progressive reclamation, and would significantly reduce the unfair mine clean-up burden that we are passing to future generations.

The March 2019 *Wild Lands Advocate* featured a timely overview of Alberta's Mine Financial Security Program by AWA intern Alyssa Anderson. It noted AER's February 2018 internal calculation of \$130 billion for Alberta oil sands mine reclamation liabilities, far exceeding oilsands mine companies' self-reported reclamation liabilities of \$28 billion, for which companies have posted \$939 million with the government. These AER documents were obtained under freedom of information requests and published by several national media outlets in November 2018. The *WLA* article also profiled recent research by Canada's EcoFiscal Commission that described the stronger financial security regulations in place for mining in several other provinces and territories.

To date, there have been no commitments by Alberta regulators to the kind of reforms needed to reduce these public financial and environmental risks. AWA will continue to seek these reforms.

Tenure

AWA believes that Alberta Energy must assume responsibility for issuing and renewing tenures within a framework that includes:

- science-based thresholds to limit cumulative effects upon land, biodiversity, air and water;
- maintaining and protecting habitat of species at risk;
- respect for existing protective notations; and
- a mechanism for public input and review of tenure applications and renewals.

AWA has engaged throughout the past several years with Alberta Energy to prevent extensions of expiring energy leases in prime grassland conservation areas, particularly in the Milk River Ridge – Twin River area. In December, AWA was relieved to learn that Granite Oil decided not to proceed with the development of its Twin River lease, which we believe should never have been renewed by Alberta Energy in the previous year.

In AWA's caribou conservation work, we continue to advocate strongly for the continuation of Alberta's 2016 moratoria on new energy tenure inside woodland caribou ranges, to uphold Alberta's commitment to achieve self-sustaining caribou populations.

Renewable Energy

In 2015, Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan committed to securing 30 percent of the electricity in Alberta's grid from renewable energy sources by 2030. As much as AWA supported this goal,



AWA believes that developing renewable energy sources such as wind and solar must proceed in a fashion respecting and promoting the health of Alberta's wildlife and landscapes.

Renewable energy projects must proceed in ways that do not create damaging new disturbances. AWA continues to oppose any renewable energy project, including transmission lines and other infrastructure, on public lands (leased or not-leased). AWA also urges renewable energy developers to consider previously disturbed brownfield locations as the sites for their projects.

In AWA's view, these considerations are not given enough weight in the provincial regulatory process. In part this is due to the fact that AWA, as a provincial conservation organization, is seldom given standing to intervene when energy developers apply to the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC). For example, in December 2018 AWA registered to participate in the Fox Coulee solar project application. AWA wanted to participate in this project's proceedings, in part, because of concerns about the potential impact the project could have on species-at-risk in the project area (such as burrowing owls). The AUC rejected AWA's request. It denied AWA standing based on its view that the project did not "directly and adversely affect" AWA. In the view of the AUC, general concerns such as the protection of endangered species and their habitats only can be raised if a party can demonstrate that those concerns "may directly and adversely affect the rights of a person" (such as a legal right to property ownership). The AUC regulatory process should be a process that is more hospitable to public interest arguments. On June 10, 2019, the United Conservative Party government informed the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO), that it would not be continuing the previous government's Renewable Electricity Program (REP). While the new government will not support renewable energy subsidies, they have promised to honor the existing contracts reached through the REP program. It also welcomes "market-driven" renewables that can compete with other forms of power production.

AWA hopes that renewable energy has a bright future in Alberta. But provincial regulatory processes must ensure that renewable energy developments prioritize the ecological integrity of a landscape to support healthy wildlife populations and surrounding communities.

Coal

The NDP provincial government continued its plan to phase out emissions from coal-fired electricity generation by 2030 under the Climate Leadership Plan. The plan stated that Alberta will increase the percentage of electricity supplied from renewable energy sources to 30 percent by 2030; it would do this by replacing up to two thirds of the retiring coal capacity with renewable energy. One third of that coal capacity would be replaced with natural gas. This was anticipated to be an enormous task since Statistics Canada reported that, in 2014, 56 percent of the electricity generated in Alberta came from coal. The coal phase-out was arguably the most climate-friendly component of the NDP's climate plan.

From 2017-2018 to 2018-19, coal generation fell from generating 59 percent of Alberta's power to 47 percent. Currently, it is unknown whether the new provincial government will continue Alberta's phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation by 2030. In November 2019, the commitment to eliminate coal power generation could still be found on the Alberta government's website. AWA continues to oppose coal projects that threaten Alberta's wilderness or compromise ecological values.



In January 2019, AWA commented on the Proposed Approach for Coal Mining Effluent Regulations within Canada. These coal mining effluent regulations should prioritize the protection of wildlife habitat and the natural integrity and functioning of a landscape. The proposed regulations required a strengthened cumulative effects approach as well as the consideration of legacy effects and contamination of decommissioned sites.

AWA submitted a letter of concern with regards to Teck Resources' Cheviot mine expansions in early May 2019. The expansions, filed with the Alberta Energy Regulator in May 2018, included developing the Mackenzie and Redcap pits which were a part of the original Mineral Surface Lease (MSL). The expansions were projected to extend production of the Cheviot mine to 2027, with an estimated 1.9 million tonnes of steelmaking coal produced per year. According to the Alberta Energy Regulator website, Teck had anticipated that the Cheviot mine expansions would increase the total disturbance of the mine site by an additional 606.5 hectares.

AWA voiced concern about these expansions. One major reason for our concern is selenium poisoning. Selenium poisoning has been documented in surrounding aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. In the absence of technology able to effectively remove selenium from effluent we are very concerned that if these expansions proceed they would exacerbate the legacy effects of the Cheviot project. This concern also is animated by the absence of coal mining regulations that specifically monitor and manage deleterious substances such as selenium. By the end of May, Teck Resources Ltd announced its decision not to pursue the Mackenzie/Redcap expansions after reviewing the project economics.

In May 2019 the westward expansion of an open pit surface mine, Phase II of the Vista Coal Mine by Coalspur Mine Ltd, was announced. The mine is located near Hinton and the expansion intends to increase annual production from 10 to 15 million clean tonnes per year. AWA wrote to the AER and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change requesting that the approval of the expansion be reconsidered, and that the project be designated for an environmental assessment under section 14(2) of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012. McPherson Creek, adjacent to the proposed expansion, provides an essential wildlife corridor, numerous wetlands critical to wildlife habitat, and is home to vital populations of endangered and threatened Athabasca Rainbow Trout and Bull Trout respectively. McPherson Creek also provides traditional ecological knowledge value for local Indigenous people including Alexis Nakota Sioux, Samson Cree, Whitefish Lake, and Ermineskin Cree First Nations. On August 28, 2019 the Impact Assessment Act (IAA) came into force, repealing the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 (CEAA 2012). AWA's request will be considered under the IAA. Currently, the designation request for the Vista Coal mine expansions are under review.

Grassy Mountain

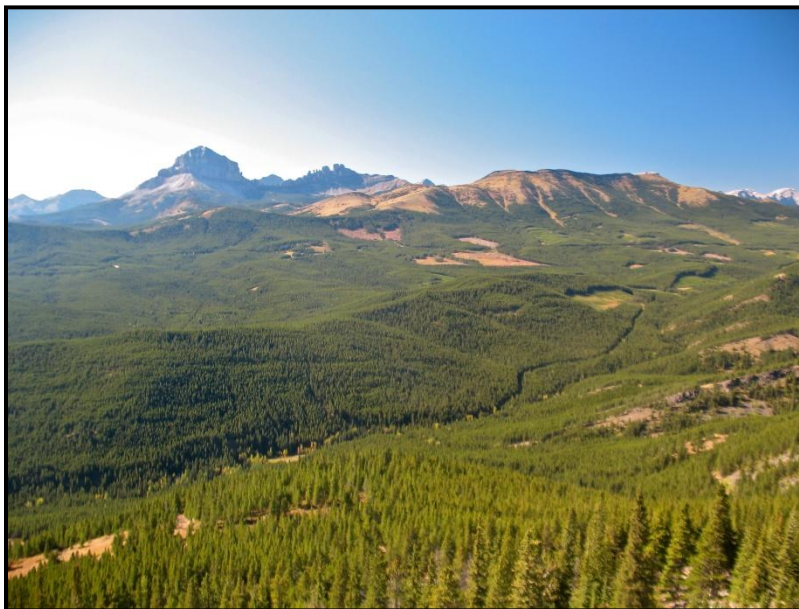
Benga Mining Limited, a subsidiary of the Australian company Riversdale Resources, has proposed to develop and operate an open-pit metallurgical coal mine approximately seven kilometres north of Blairmore in the Crowsnest Pass. The project is expected to last 25 years with a production capacity of four million tonnes a year, with a possibility to expand the mine. The 'Friends of Grassy Mountain', a loose coalition of local interested parties, was formed in 2015 to share information and raise awareness about the risks of re-opening a mine. AWA successfully applied for participant funding with some of the 'Friends' that are directly affected; this coalition of AWA and Grassy Mountain Group will participate when the project proceeds to a public hearing.



On January 22, 2016, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency determined that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) produced by Riversdale Resources did not satisfy all requirements of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA 2012). Accordingly, it required the company to respond to a number of information requests. On January 25, the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) informed Riversdale Resources that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was incomplete. These two rulings put a halt on the review process until deficiencies within the scope of the report were addressed. In August and September 2016, Riversdale Resources submitted an updated EIS and responded to the information requests. In December of 2016, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency again found that not all requirements of CEAA 2012 had been satisfied; the federal agency again demanded that the proponent respond to a number of information requests, following which the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency would give an update. In August 2018, the Agency issued yet another request for additional information in order to fulfill EIS requirements.

In August 2018, a Joint Review Panel for the environmental assessment was established, with panel members being appointed. The Panel held a public comment period on “the sufficiency and technical merit” of the EIS to determine whether it has enough information to proceed with a hearing. AWA provided comments to the Expert Panel in January of 2018, requesting more information with regards to the anticipated impacts of the project to species at risk, cumulative effects, and interactions with watershed hydrology. The public comment period resulted in a new information request, and Addendums 9 and 10 were published in September 2019.

The Joint Review Panel is required to hold another public comment period. If, after reviewing written comments from the public, Indigenous groups and peoples, government departments or agencies, or other technical experts, the Joint Review Panel determines that it has sufficient information to proceed to the public hearing, it will announce a hearing date, which we anticipate may occur in early 2020.



The proposed site for Grassy Mountain coal mine includes populations of threatened westslope cutthroat trout and endangered whitebark pine. Photo © D. Mayhood

WILDLIFE

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

Enacted in 1982, Alberta's Fish and Wildlife Policy does little to protect wildlife, and does not represent contemporary science or the public's regard for wildlife. The 1980 Wildlife Policy was written at a time when there was far less regard for the intrinsic value of wildlife, when certain populations and their habitats were seen as inexhaustible and the primary consideration was for "wildlife to pay its way". AWA believes that this mandate is seriously outdated, and that Alberta needs an updated policy and accompanying regulations that will protect sensitive species and biodiversity generally, in line with its international commitments.

Species at Risk

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

With immense declines in global biodiversity, public representatives need to be accountable for creating a framework that is robust enough to protect Alberta's wildlife and habitat, and is reflective of the public's intrinsic value for wildlife.

Alberta's *Wildlife Act* has a tremendous number of bureaucratic hurdles that hinders effective progress towards preventing the extirpation of endangered or threatened species in Alberta. AWA continues to raise awareness and advocate for improved provincial legislation that hastens the designation of species at risk, requires the legal protection of critical habitat, and provides means for developing and implementing recovery strategies within obligatory timelines.

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

Effective application of SARA to bring about more habitat protection is needed. Species at risk listings usually occur several years after the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recommends a certain species is at some level of risk of extirpation. Studies have shown that when a listing decision is made, species perceived to be economically valuable, are managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), or those that occur only in Canada are the least likely to receive listing. Recovery strategies, protection orders, and action plans for the majority of species listed under SARA are either issued well past legislated deadlines or not at all.

As critical habitat orders only apply to federal lands, there are many species that have been left stranded. In the case of caribou, AWA has been working relentlessly with colleagues across the country to ensure enough habitat is protected to ensure the population stability and recovery of this iconic species. Recently, the governments of Alberta and Canada released a draft agreement



on timelines and actions to be accomplished towards developing woodland caribou recovery plans, however, AWA remains concerned that the draft agreement fails to implement interim habitat protection needed to slow the dwindling population numbers. AWA has been asking the federal Minister to issue a safety net order, which a Minister can do if they believe provinces/territories have failed to protect a species. Safety net orders extend the protections under SARA to provincial and territorial lands. To date, not a single safety net order has been issued.

AWA and partner conservation groups are at constant vigil and have found it necessary to turn to legal action in order to have SARA invoked. Please refer to specific sections for details of our work on species at risk that include woodland caribou, greater sage-grouse, native trout including westslope cutthroat trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, bull trout, wood and plains bison.

Grizzly Bears

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

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

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

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

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

During the summer of 2018, AWA met with the recently appointed chair of the Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) to address our concerns over potential delisting of grizzly bears as a threatened species along with AWA's fundamental concerns with the *Wildlife*



Act. AWA believes that without a complete population assessment and substantial progress made to protect their habitat, delisting grizzly bears as threatened is inappropriate. Without addressing what drove grizzly bears to a threatened status in the first place, delisting grizzly bears will likely decrease public support for the species and return them to a jeopardized state. AWA continues to urge decision makers to address the concerning lack of legal obligations within the *Wildlife Act* as it has considerable repercussions for the development of effective recovery plans for species at risk.

The summer of 2018 also included many grizzly bear advisories for the public within the eastern slopes and parts of central Alberta. Unfortunately, the summer of 2019 only further contributed to the number of human-caused mortalities for Alberta's grizzly population. August 28, 2019 marked the death of a 275 kg male grizzly near Jumpingpound Creek, the third male grizzly to be killed in that area in the past five years due to highway traffic. June 2019 resulted in the loss of a male grizzly bear that was struck and killed by a semi-trailer one kilometre south of the Trans-Canada Highway, in addition to an emaciated young female grizzly having to be euthanized after being struck by a vehicle on the highway only 10 days prior.

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

Black Bears

Although black bears seem abundant in Alberta, AWA remains concerned that they may be poorly managed in some regions. We believe that more transparent and scientific data is required to track mortality and incidences of human-bear conflicts.

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

Alongside grizzlies, black bears are experiencing an increase in human related mortalities. Over the span of the summer, a total of six black bears were killed in Banff National Park, four bears on the Trans-Canada Highway and Icefield Parkway, and one on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Although black bears are considered to be more resilient to human activity with having higher density numbers and reproductive rates, AWA continues to advocate for a more thorough assessment of population numbers, the rehabilitation of orphaned black bear cubs, continual funding for the Alberta BearSmart programs, and implementing more specific measures for reducing bear attractants. AWA also believes that the hunting practice of bear baiting is unethical, and will continue to advocate for its immediate end, in addition to mandatory reporting of unlicensed harvest on private land.



Caribou

AWA's vision is for self-sustaining populations of Alberta's threatened woodland caribou. Woodland caribou are a 'sentinel' species for older, relatively intact boreal and foothills forests and wetlands. Many other wildlife species rely upon these lands, which also store significant water and carbon. Wise management of these forests is vital to our health and economy.

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

Also in October 2018, two AWA representatives attended the national caribou conference in Ottawa. We were able to establish and renew personal ties with federal civil servants, elected MPs, indigenous representatives, researchers, and ENGO colleagues.

Our dedicated Caribou4Ever Website <http://caribou4ever.ca/> has been a public-facing information site for caribou research, news, and citizen action, including a letter template to write provincial and federal decision makers. It will be renewed again after the autumn 2019 federal election.

AWA seeks a collaborative range planning process to develop legally enforceable range plans that will set a reasonable target decade to achieve and maintain at least 65% undisturbed caribou habitat. The October 2017 deadline for such range plans, set out by the 2012 federal boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy under the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*, has come and gone. AWA met and corresponded with federal and provincial officials throughout the year. Meanwhile, new industrial surface disturbance has continued in caribou critical habitat, further endangering caribou survival and recovery prospects, and by late 2018 there were still no SARA-compliant plans in sight.

As a result, in January 2019, Ecojustice lawyers, acting on behalf of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, AWA and David Suzuki Foundation, filed a lawsuit against the federal environment minister for her failure to protect the critical habitat of five boreal caribou herds in northeastern Alberta. Decades of federal and provincial inaction mean that interim federal habitat protection is urgently needed. We anticipate a court hearing late in 2019 or early in 2020.

Greater Sage-Grouse

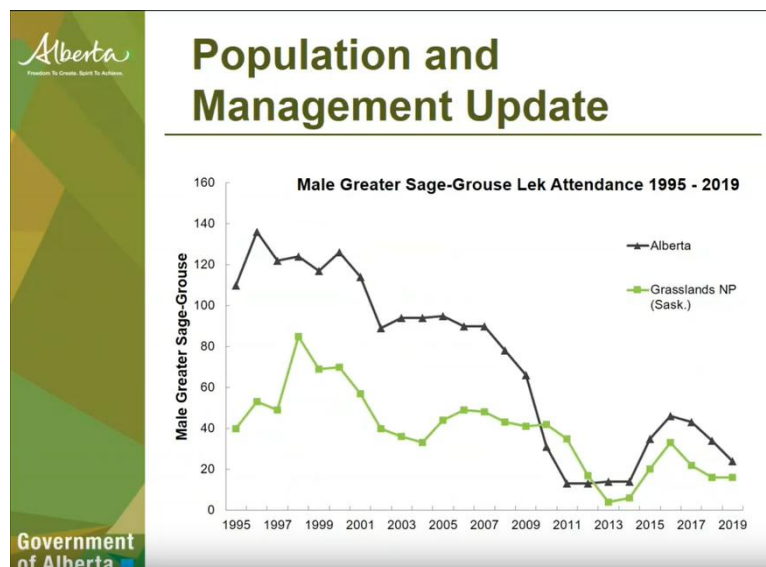
The long-term future of our grasslands, which provide habitat for greater sage-grouse as well as dozens of other federally and provincially listed species depends on the stewardship of many, not the least of which is the stewardship landowners and leaseholders practice. Just a few years ago, in the absence of any meaningful protection from the provincial and the federal



governments, it seemed inevitable that greater sage-grouse would go extinct in Canada. In 1996 the estimate was 777 birds, by 2013 only 8 males were counted in Alberta. In 2013 AWA, the Wilderness Committee, Nature Saskatchewan and Grasslands Naturalists - represented by Ecojustice lawyers – successfully challenged the federal government to step up protections for the sage-grouse, resulting in an Emergency Protection Order.

The protection order has resulted in an overall increase in populations: from 14 males in 2014, to 35 counted in 2015. The entire 2016 Canadian population of sage-grouse was estimated to be 340 birds, including 38 females imported from Montana in the spring of 2016.

Unfortunately, Alberta's 2019 spring count yielded a further decline of 10 less males; only 24 males were counted and the entire Alberta population estimate is 72. 2017 found 43 males on 3 leks, compared to 40 males in 2016. West Nile virus was confirmed as the cause of death for one Greater Sage-grouse in southern Alberta this year.



Saskatchewan's sage-grouse counts numbered only 18 males in 2012. In 2019, Saskatchewan Environment reported only 2 active leks both found in Grasslands National Park - 16 males were counted, compared to 33 males in 2016.

Translocation to Alberta from Montana did occur in 2019. Alberta Environment continued with predator and habitat projects and the Calgary Zoo released some birds that they are tracking. Considering the success at the Calgary Zoo in raising sage-grouse chicks, it seems reproductive ability is not the problem, clearly, lack of protected habitat is the much more significant issue. Costly rearing and release programs are no substitute for habitat.

AWA, currently represented by Ecojustice, will participate in legal action filed by the city of Medicine Hat and LGX Oil against the Emergency Protection Order. The process was stalled as LGX Oil is in receivership; a court date is expected in 2020.

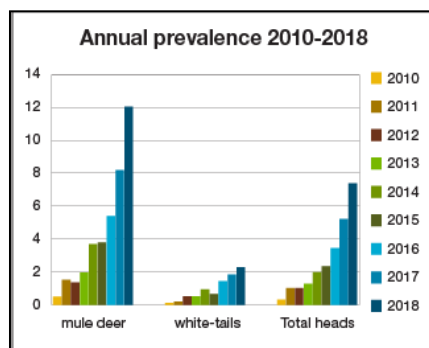
Wolves

AWA's goal is for the Alberta government to take responsibility for managing Alberta's wolves in a science-based, responsible and transparent manner, recognizing their value as a top predator. The main focus of our 2018-19 wolf work has been in relation to woodland caribou management. Caribou and wolves have co-existed in Alberta for thousands of years. Forestry cutblocks, seismic lines, roads and other industrial infrastructure has stimulated deer, moose and wolf populations in caribou ranges. This habitat fragmentation has robbed caribou of their ability to avoid overlap with wolves. In Alberta's most disturbed ranges, the dire measure of predator culls can only be justified as a temporary, last resort measure combined with strong habitat protection and restoration.

AWA is very concerned that Alberta's ongoing wolf culls have not been accompanied by actions to halt habitat loss. We oppose the use of poison in this program as inherently inhumane. We remain concerned that this program will continue to be misused to justify further delays in urgently needed reductions of human-caused habitat disturbance in caribou ranges. We have emphasized this point in interactions with provincial and federal officials and in media interviews, and will do so again in Alberta's upcoming caribou sub-regional task force groups.

Game Farming

AWA supports living wildlife as part of our economy and we restrict this support to economies based on maintaining populations living wild in their natural habitats. AWA has opposed the domestication, privatization and commercialization of wildlife including on game farms since 1980 when Alberta's Wildlife Policy was rewritten to allow game farming. Chronic wasting disease (CWD), the pervasive, unstoppable prion disease, spread from game farms to the wild by 1996. Since then, the growth of the disease has been exponential and continues to spread west.



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

AWA has requested both federal and provincial leadership in confronting CWD and in eliminating the game farming industry in the province. Although there is no record of CWD jumping the species barrier to humans, AWA has long held that it will likely only be a matter of time. A similar prion disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), provides a cautionary tale on how human-animal contraction can have devastating consequences. In April 2017, preliminary findings from a study of long-term exposure of CWD to macaques conducted at the University of Calgary indicated that those that were fed deer meat eventually developed symptoms of the disease. Health Canada and province recommend "avoiding consumption of foods from known infected or any diseased animals".

Fortunately, public awareness of the potential public health crisis has grown in the past year. In December of 2018, the Dene Nation raised concerns of the potential impacts that CWD would have if spread to remaining caribou populations. Over 30 stakeholders and experts wrote to the federal government in the summer, warning of potential trade embargoes and health risks if the government fails to contain the disease, which received widespread media attention. The National Fishing and Hunting Collaborative (containing fish and game organizations across the country) urged the federal and provincial governments to take action to meaningfully tackle CWD, and has listed it as a top priority in the upcoming federal election.

Native Trout

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

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

While westslope cutthroat trout are the only species currently with legal habitat protection, other species including bull trout and Athabasca rainbow trout have recently been listed and will receive their own habitat protections in time. Therefore, it is important that the Precautionary Principle be applied to land use decisions affecting all threatened native fish species. AWA will continue to raise awareness about the important connection between healthy water and abundant native trout.

Athabasca Rainbow Trout

Athabasca Rainbow Trout is currently listed as threatened under the Alberta *Wildlife Act* and was listed as Endangered under the Species at Risk Act in August of 2019. AWA will continue to advocate for swift recovery actions to save this endangered species.

Bull Trout

In July 2015, AWA wrote in support of a listing as threatened for bull trout under SARA, which occurred in August 2019. AWA continues to be involved in provincial recovery efforts for bull trout, participating in the development of a recovery plan and strategy for the species.

In late 2017 the government announced plans to recover native fish in the Central Eastern Slopes of Alberta. Called the North Central Native Trout Recovery Program (NCNT), it aimed to close a number of watersheds to angling for 5 years, which would be coupled with other initiatives such as habitat restoration, water quality improvements, and the suppression of non-native fish. Some anglers raised concerns, arguing that they were being progressively restricted, while habitat issues were not being addressed. As a result, in late February 2018, the



Environment Minister announced the government would be conducting an independent review to confirm whether the approach taken by the NCNT is the best one for native trout recovery.

From 2018 to mid 2019, AWA participated in meetings to discuss how to best move forward with the science review, conducted by the Environmental Monitoring and Science Division. The stakeholders at the table – which included anglers, conservation groups, and scientists – agreed to act as an Advisory Committee during the Third-Party Science Review. The final review was published in August of 2019. The review concluded that there were multiple strengths of the program as it currently stands. It emphasized the importance of undertaking a quantitative approach to assess and address the threats to native trout in the East Slopes. Using a handful of watersheds as test cases to determine the validity of the modeling work was also highlighted as being a useful approach that could yield insight for Alberta and other jurisdictions. The review also noted a number of weaknesses of the program: it highlighted the need to consolidate all research used to create inputs into the model, and suggested a need to systematically review the inputs into the model. It also suggested that active stakeholder participation was necessary in order to achieve recovery outcomes. AWA supports the conclusions made in the review process and will work to ensure the provincial government follows up on the review recommendations and continues work on the recovery of threatened native trout.

Westslope cutthroat trout

Westslope cutthroat trout, provincially and federally designated as threatened, has been an ongoing priority for AWA conservation efforts. Now that a critical habitat order is issued, protection and restoration of this species and its habitat must be effectively implemented.

A groundbreaking case has helped to ensure this: on June 26 2019, Brooks Motorcycle Club and its Vice President were fined a total of \$70,000 under the *Species at Risk Act* and the *Fisheries Act* for organizing a motocross race that crossed through North and South Racehorse Creeks several times, seriously harming and causing the death of young bull trout and threatened westslope cutthroat trout. AWA applauds the decision for defending Alberta's imperiled native trout and upholding the intent of the *Species at Risk Act*, as well as recognizing the damage that motorized use can have on fish habitat.

In February of 2019, the Timberwolf Wilderness Society filed an application in federal court to force the Fisheries and Oceans Minister to publish an Action Plan for westslope cutthroat trout. A few months later, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada released a draft Action Plan for westslope cutthroat trout. Despite being more than 4 years late, the document is sorely lacking in details, concrete on-the-ground actions, and is unambitious in its recovery goals. AWA believes the draft plan's new "bounding-box" approach to critical habitat will likely perpetuate further habitat destruction. The Action Plan must also contain concrete commitments from DFO to routinely monitor and report on the status of all remaining westslope cutthroat trout populations, complete on-the-ground assessments, and create an immediate restoration plan for critical habitat. AWA awaits the publication of the final Action Plan and whether it addresses the concerns listed above.

Wood and Plains Bison

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



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

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

In Alberta, listed bison are only found in the Bison Protection Area in northwestern Alberta and the part of northeastern Alberta approximately between Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park and Wood Buffalo National Park that is home to the Ronald Lake herd. In the former area it is illegal to hunt, harm, or traffic in bison without a licence; hunting of the Ronald Lake herd in the aforementioned part of northeastern Alberta is closed until further notice.

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

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

In early 2017, a herd of 16 plains bison were "released" into an enclosed pasture in Panther Valley, on the eastern edge of Banff National Park. In late July 2018 these bison, now numbering 31, were released into a 1,200 km² zone. The provincial government created the Upper Red Deer River Special Bison Area in August that means in the 239 km² area plains bison are treated as wildlife.

AWA hopes that this provincial designation is the first step towards differentiating types of bison according to ownership. Instead of the geographical designation adopted by the province the status of Plains Bison should depend on whether they are located on a commercial farm, a private conservation herd, or in the wild. This way, wild bison would get the protection that they desperately need to begin recovery in the wilderness. Such differentiation would also go some distance in implementing the desire of some First Nations to see the provincial government change the status of Plains Bison to wildlife.

Limber and Whitebark Pine

Whitebark pine was added to the federal Species at Risk list in June 2012. AWA has also worked towards having limber pine receive the same status, which was recommended by COSEWIC in 2014. Both species are listed as endangered provincially under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. A provincial recovery team has been established for both species. An Alberta Whitebark Pine



Recovery Plan 2013-2018 was released in 2014 and an Alberta Limber Pine Recovery Plan 2014 - 2019 was released in the fall of 2014.

The Lake Louise resort in Banff National Park was charged after it came to light in 2013 that employees had cut down trees along a ski run. The Crown alleges at least 39 endangered Whitebark pine trees were felled. Whitebark pine trees take 30 to 50 years before they are able to reproduce, and when they do have cones, it takes a Clark's Nutcracker birds, to open them and bury them in the ground. The long-lived, five-needle pines are native to high elevations, and are threatened by invasive disease, fire and climate change. They are also considered crucial to the ecological composition of an area because they provide food and habitat for animals and helps stabilize steep subalpine slopes. The resort pleaded guilty on two charges – one for cutting down endangered whitebark pine, another for felling another 100 trees without authorization from Parks Canada.

On November 30 2018, Lake Louise was sentenced \$1.6 million under the *Species at Risk Act* and \$0.5 million under the *Canada National Parks Act*. In the sentence, Judge Lamoreaux notes that the maximum fine would have been \$17.4 million under SARA and \$25 million under the Parks Act. AWA applauds this upholding of SARA and hopes the funds from this fine will be used towards Whitebark pine recovery efforts.



Endangered species, like this grizzly bear, depend on wilderness areas to thrive. This photo was taken in the Bighorn during one of AWA's hikes this summer. © K. Unger

Government Policy

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

Public Lands

Public lands issues have been a priority for AWA since the organization was founded. AWA has continuously advocated for a comprehensive public lands policy that is developed in a transparent and inclusive way to reflect all values Albertans have for public lands, however, the government of Alberta has shown no urgency in tackling this issue. AWA believes that as a public resource, Albertans should have the opportunity to be engaged with the respect to the management of public lands. Developing a public lands policy would enable Albertans to become active agents of change in addressing important issues such as access, sales and transfers, surface rights compensation from oil and gas operators to grazing lessees, and conservation. AWA opposes any further destruction of native habitat across all Natural Regions of Alberta on public lands for any development purpose, in addition to the sale of public land removing it from the public realm.

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

Originally enacted in 2003 under the *Public Lands Act*, the Recreational Access Regulation was developed with the intent to clarify conditions required by the public to access grazing leases for recreational purposes, however, access issues have worsened significantly. Despite leaseholders being required to provide "reasonable access" under the regulation, numerous grazing leaseholders continue to prevent public access. The regulation expired in March 2017, but was renewed without full stakeholder or public consultation. AWA continues to advocate for a public lands policy that would in part address this issue.

Alongside our *Wild Spaces 2020 campaign*, AWA continues to promote our Public Lands video series to raise awareness of the issues facing public lands, whilst promoting their intrinsic values and promoting public involvement. Some topics addressed in the videos include "What are public lands?", "What are the impacts of the use and abuse of public lands?", "What are the laws and regulations that govern public lands?", and "Can I use public lands?" We have documented between 37 and 709 views of the individual videos in the set of nine videos dealing with public lands. Our outreach and uptake of this important educational tool will continue to be a priority in the coming year.

Public land sales in the Peace River Country for conversion into agricultural land were mentioned as a possibility in the provincial election campaign. AWA continues to advocate for the responsible management and use of public lands, and remains adamant that these valuable wilderness areas need to reside in perpetuity within the public realm. AWA will continue to oppose the sale and conversion of public land for short term economic gain, and believes that



maintaining the ecological integrity of public lands is incredibly important to the health and wealth of our communities.

Tax-recovery Lands

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

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

Protected Areas - Federal

AWA uses ecological integrity as a lens to evaluate the state of Alberta's national parks. Identified as the Minister's first priority under the *National Parks Act*, ecological integrity is the condition AWA uses to assess the activities of government agencies and private sector actors alike.

In this respect AWA encouraged Waterton Lakes National Park to invest Kenow wildfire recovery funds into strengthening the ecological integrity of this jewel in the Crown of the Continent. The Park's grasslands and forest ecosystems were ranked as "poor" in 2016 – rankings that might be improved in part through the wise investment of these funds. AWA also used *Wild Lands Advocate* as a vehicle to raise greater awareness about the important ways in which volunteer activities at Waterton Lakes can promote the ecological dimension AWA treasures.

In Banff National Park, AWA spoke out against the tenor of a study exploring the possibility of instituting all-year passenger rail service between Calgary and Banff. This was a study that, in AWA's judgment, paid no attention to the impact this new service would have on wildlife in the Bow Valley. It also is a development AWA sees as animated by aspirations to increase the numbers of tourists visiting Banff. Here it will join measures such as the expansion of the Sunshine Ski Resort skier capacity that call into question whether Parks Canada can enhance the ecological integrity of Banff National Park.

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

The Boreal section outlines our work related to Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP).



Protected Areas - Provincial

The Land Use Framework has been one of the primary mechanisms for achieving provincially protected areas. The process is slow and has essentially been stalled for the past three years as management plans are developed for the areas which have regional plans developed under the Framework. The plans to operationalize the Framework are even slower. Alberta has a very long way to go to meet international protected area targets that are representative of the six landscape types in Alberta. AWA will continue to provide reasonable suggestions for protection, deferral of activities and alternative mechanisms for achieving conservation and protection, within and outside of the Land Use Framework process.

Protected Areas Progress

Alberta's protected areas network includes five federally-protected National Parks (Banff, Jasper, Waterton, Wood Buffalo and Elk Island) as well as a series of provincially-protected areas. The Alberta *Land Reference Manual* provides data on the number and area of provincially protected areas, located in the table below. Section 7 land is a classification describing designation of lands to be managed under the Act that are not yet established as parks or recreation areas.

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

Name	2019	2018	2017	Hectares	Hectares	Hectares
				2019	2018	2017
Wilderness Areas	3	3	3	100,988.79	100,988.79	100,988.79
Ecological Reserves	15	15	15	26,843.34	26,843.34	26,843.34
Wildland Provincial Parks	34	33	33	3,333,386.29	3,171,506.29	1,811,117.59
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	1	1	459,671.04	459,671.04	459,671.04
Provincial Parks	76	76	77	246,797.89	246,797.89	246,864.92
Provincial Recreation Areas	204	204	203	88,602.86	88,602.86	87,692.69
Heritage Rangelands	2	2	2	12,010.47	12,010.47	12,010.47
Natural Areas	138	138	139	319,324.25	129,228.98	129,943.98
TOTAL	473	472	473	4,397,529.66	4,235,649.66	2,875,132.82
Section 7 Land	10	10	10	1450.51	1450.51	1450.51

Wild Spaces 2020

The Wild Spaces 2020 campaign was launched in September 2018 to ignite support and awareness for Alberta's Wild Spaces. While the protection of Wild Spaces has been part of AWA's vision for more than 50 years, the Wild Spaces 2020 campaign has been brought to life by the renewed conservation targets adopted by the federal and provincial governments. These conservation targets, called the Aichi Targets, were set in 2010 at the Convention for Biological Diversity in Aichi, Japan. In 2015, the federal government adopted Aichi Target 11 as Canada's primary target ("Canada Target 1") to achieve by 2020. Canada Target 1 states that:

"By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically



representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.”

The goals of the Wild Spaces 2020 campaign highlighted AWA’s areas of concern across Alberta’s six Natural Regions, featuring current issues, ecological, social and economic values, and ways members can support conservation. Emphasizing the imbalance in representative protection between Alberta’s Natural Regions, and expressing the need for increased protection in the Grasslands, Parkland, and Foothills Natural Regions was key. The campaign has involved a series of presentations and social media posts describing Wild Spaces, Canada Target 1, and the need for representative protection.

In the fall of 2018, AWA wrote the Premier and Minister of Environment and Parks describing the need for the Government to develop plans for 17 percent protection. This was tangential to the launch of the Wild Spaces 2020 public letter writing campaign, hosted through a Protected Areas webpage on AWA’s website. From October 2018 to July 2019, the letter writing campaign received 231 submissions, in addition to 920 submissions specific to the Bighorn Country campaign (more on this in the ‘Bighorn Country’ section). All submissions were directed to Alberta’s Premier, Minister of the Environment and Parks, and local MLAs identified by the postal code of the sender.

The Wild Spaces 2020 campaign will continue until December 2020, the deadline for *Canada Target 1*’s current commitments. It is likely the Convention on Biological Diversity will set the next biodiversity target as 30 percent protection by 2030; a significant challenge for Canada if we the current rate of creating protected areas continues.

Land-Use Framework

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

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP)

AWA provided input on the continued land-use planning processes in the SSRP. The Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan (LFMP) and Recreation Management Plan (RMP) were released in early 2018. Currently overdue for release are the Biodiversity Management Framework, which was expected in 2015, as well as the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Human Spatial Footprint report, was due in within one year of the LFMP’s and RMP’s release (May 2019). AWA believes these plans should establish strict and enforceable limits on land use and linear disturbances within the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills, as well as the South Saskatchewan Region broadly, in order to meet conservation targets.

The SSRP was amended in 2017 after Cabinet approved Orders-in-Council to establish the Castle Provincial Park and expand the Castle Wildland Provincial Park on January 20, 2017. In July 2019, with 132 km of trails remaining in the Castle Parks, the Government of Alberta decided to halt trail closures to reassess the suitability of trails within the area. AWA will continue to support the enactment of the remaining SSRP conservation commitments through Orders in Council formalizing conservation boundaries, and protecting critical westslope cutthroat trout habitat in the Castle Parks region by supporting the removal and reclamation of motorized trail systems.



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

North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP)

Work on the NSRP was started in 2014 but has been hampered by competing priorities within the provincial legislature and the change in the governing party in May 2015. With a change of government again in May 2019, it is unknown whether progress on the NSRP will be made.

A terms-of-reference document and a public workbook were released in 2014, with Phase I public and stakeholder consultation sessions being held and a Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) being convened and subsequently an advice document drafted. AWA was actively involved with staff, board members, and volunteers attending more than half of the Phase I consultation sessions.

In May 2018, the provincial government finally released recommendations made by the NSRAC in 2014. AWA continues to have discussions with government members in support of increasing the network of protected areas in the North Saskatchewan Region, and expects to be heavily involved in providing feedback and engaging members in upcoming drafts of the NSRP.

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan

AWA welcomed the establishment of a significant new protected area in the Lower Athabasca region in the past year. In March 2019, the Alberta government established Kitaskino Nuwenënë, a 1,620 km² Wildland Provincial Park, along the southern border of Wood Buffalo National Park. First Nations and Metis communities in the region will have significant involvement in the governance and management of this new protected area.

In January 2019, during the public consultation period for this new park, AWA learned from government officials that there have been discussions with northeast Alberta indigenous communities about cooperative management of the Lower Athabasca Region Wildland Provincial Parks established in May 2018. AWA supports meaningful participation and leadership by indigenous communities in managing these protected areas. AWA also asked to be included in management plan consultation for the important Ronald Lake bison herd, whose range is partly protected by Kitaskino Nuwenënë.

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) is still missing important elements to help maintain and restore biodiversity to uphold Alberta's international commitments to sustainable development. The LARP Review Panel's 2016 report upheld First Nations' submissions that LARP was not adequately managing cumulative impacts of development. AWA continues to seek the completion of overdue LARP regulatory tools such as sub-regional surface disturbance plans and meaningful biodiversity management frameworks, including for species of particular importance to indigenous communities. We raised these concerns in several meetings this year with Land Use Secretariat government officials.

Future Land Use Planning Regions

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



Biodiversity

Alberta has made important national and international commitments to maintain and restore its biological diversity, including committing to uphold the 1995 Canadian Biodiversity Strategy. AWA has consistently encouraged delivery on those commitments. We have also drawn attention to the ongoing evidence that Alberta's biodiversity is declining under the cumulative impacts of our land-use decisions.

Alberta still lacks a Biodiversity Strategy, which was supposed to inform Land Use Framework regional and sub-regional land-use plans from the 2008 era onwards. In meetings this year with government officials, we continued to emphasize the importance of a strong Biodiversity Strategy. We also continue to seek regional biodiversity management frameworks that will operate to forecast and prevent further significant habitat fragmentation and changes in native species intactness.

Indigenous Peoples

In the past year, AWA staff sought to further build understanding in the role that we all play in reconciliation efforts and has worked towards building relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities. These efforts to learn and establish connections relate to all aspects of our work, in particular, the need for Canada to establish a system of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), in which Indigenous communities play a major role in the conservation of Canada's landscape.

In June 2019, conservation specialist Grace Wark attended the 6th Annual Summit held by the Kainai Ecosystem Protection Association – *Miohpokoiiyiiksi* held in Stand Off, Alberta, themed "Planting seeds in Napi's territory". The Summit helped to provide perspective on issues that the Blood Tribe and other communities in Alberta and Montana are currently facing, and included Indigenous perspectives on climate change, and barriers and solutions to achieving food sovereignty. The KEPA Summit shed light on the strong relationship that exists between native prairies and the Blackfoot peoples, helping participants to explore the dual importance of conserving native landscapes for both their ecological value and importance to Blackfoot culture.

Later in June, AWA staff visited Blackfoot Crossing and participated in a tour of the Blackfoot Crossing facility to learn about the history of Blackfoot Crossing as a meeting place and the signing location of Treaty 7.

In late July, AWA Conservation Specialist Nissa Petterson attended the Keepers of the Water gathering held in Wabasca, Alberta. This was the first opportunity for AWA to participate in a gathering co-hosted by the Bigstone Cree First Nation. The gathering provided a tremendous opportunity to learn and connect with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Through a series of presentations and group activities such as a talking circle, AWA was able to expand and diversify our perspective on conservation concerns within Northern Alberta. Many attendees of the gathering expressed concerns for how land-uses within the Wabasca wilderness are altering the natural state and functioning of ecosystems, with particular emphasis on how these changes are impacting water quality and food security for Indigenous people. Besides the worry of rapidly changing landscape, members of the Bigstone Cree First



Nation expressed a resounding sentiment that the further Indigenous people are dissociated from nature, the less self-fulfilled they feel. It was apparent to AWA that all these changes on the landscape culminated into an oppressed or dampened self sovereignty among Indigenous communities, and that conservation efforts within the Wabasca wilderness would support First Nation's treaty rights, preserving their heritage and traditions well into the future.

Environmental Laws

In 2015, the federal government promised to restore Canada's environmental protections. It established panels of experts and committees to evaluate Canada's environmental assessment processes, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Navigation Protection Act*, and the National Energy Board. These expert panels held extensive public consultations and presented their recommendations to the government in reports which were open to public review. AWA has contributed to the review of changes to Canada's environmental laws. We presented to the Expert Panel that reviewed Canada's federal assessment processes in late 2016 and had the opportunity to meet with the federal Environment Minister to discuss the government's plans for moving forward with reforms to environmental laws and regulatory processes. AWA also provided written submissions to the Expert Panel and to the discussion paper provided by the Canadian Government.

In early 2018, the federal government put forward Bills C-68 (the *Fisheries Act*) and C-69, containing the *Impact Assessment Act*, *Canadian Energy Regulator Act*, and the *Navigation Protection Act*. Both Bills passed first reading in the House of Commons in June 2018 and were reviewed by the Senate in the fall.

Unfortunately, the Bill C-69 Senate Review process was subjected to intensive lobbying and misunderstandings about the *Impact Assessment Act* spread rapidly in public discourse. The Senate proposed 187 amendments to the bill, some of which were word-for-word copies of suggestions made by industrial players. Eventually, 100 of these recommended amendments were accepted when the bill passed on June 20. AWA's assessment of Bill C-69 is that it contains some positive amendments to the damaging changes made to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act in 2012, such as better inclusion of the public and Indigenous Peoples in the assessment process and requiring decisions to consider both the positive and negative impacts of projects on the environment, the economy and society as a whole. However, the Act fails to deliver on its key promises, is still over reliant on Ministerial Discretion and has even tighter timelines than previously.

In anticipation of the passage of Bill C-69, a number of other policies and regulations also had to be updated in order to reflect the intent of the new Act. AWA provided comments on a co-operation agreement between Canada and British Columbia, as well as on a list of what projects within federal lands will not require an Impact Assessment. AWA is disappointed with the final *Physical Activities Regulations*, published in August of 2019, as they have exempted hydraulic fracturing, geothermal, and in-situ oil sands projects from requiring an assessment, and have increased thresholds for projects which do require assessment. For example, the previous regulations requires coal mines that produced over 3,000 tonnes a day to undertake an assessment; now coal mines must produce over 5,000 tonnes/day in order to require an assessment. The *Fisheries Act* and *Bill C-69* received royal assent and become law in the summer of 2019. AWA will follow both closely to see how they will be implemented in practice.



International Cooperation

Temperate Grassland Conservation

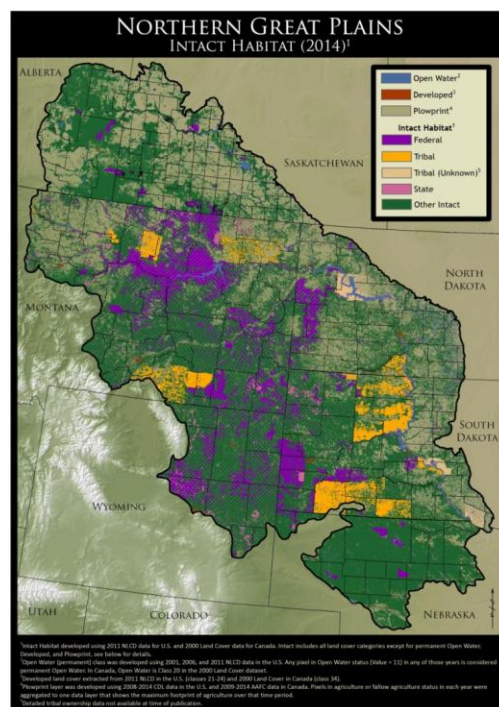
In an effort to increase the rate of progress in conserving and protecting temperate grasslands, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas created the Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force, now a Specialist Group, in 1996. This Specialist Group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

Great Plains Conservation Network (GPCN)

At 3.4 million square kilometres (841 million acres), the Great Plains stretches from Canada into Mexico and. It is the largest grassland ecosystem in North America and one of the largest in the world. The vision is to establish a sea of grass to support healthy wildlife populations and vibrant communities of people. Formerly known as the Northern Plains Conservation Network, GPCN believes that broad-scale restoration of this landscape will affirm that our society both recognizes this necessity and is progressive enough to implement this vision.

The network has participating organizations from Mexico, the United States of America and Canada. The conservation footprint on the plains is growing. The network knows no political boundaries and works for greater understanding of the need to restore prairie grasslands and for on the ground habitat restoration results. For example, the American Prairie Reserve, formed as a result of the vision, acquires land to help the vision become reality.

GPCN members have long contributed to four main foci – indigenous peoples, bison, prairie dogs and grassland birds. The bison initiative is moving forward and supporting efforts to place the bison on the tri-lateral conservation table made up of Canada, Mexico, and U.S. and



assisting First Nations (tribes) in realizing their vision for restoring healthy ecosystems and human communities. The grassland bird initiative has refocused on maintaining large blocks of native grassland and connectivity. Sage-grouse continue to be one of the issues at the forefront as the US and Canada move forward with actions to protect this species throughout western North America. Working with other GPCN members, GPCN helped retain federal ownership of PFRA Pastures, including Govenlock, in SW Saskatchewan that are critical for species at risk recovery efforts in Canada. GPCN participants are working to get federal protected area designation / long-term protection for Govenlock, Nashlyn, Reno and Battle Creek PFRA pastures. These had been in the process of being transferred back to the Government of Saskatchewan for administration until conservation organizations across North America demanded that these pastures remain under federal jurisdiction with a conservation focus.

GPCN champions protection and appropriate management of many grasslands in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan including the former Onefour Research Substation lands, former PFRA pastures and the proposed addition to the Twin River Heritage Rangeland on the Milk River Ridge. These grasslands are some of the most extensive and diverse on the northern glaciated plains and – they are home to dozens of federally and provincially listed species of concern. AWA, GPCN and others are concerned about the future protection and management of these lands now that they have been fully transferred to the Government of Alberta for administration.

AWA hosts and maintains the website for the network at www.npcn.net which will soon be found at www.gpcn.net.

Transboundary Grasslands Workshop

The Transboundary Grasslands Partnership works collaboratively to sustain healthy transboundary native biodiversity and the supporting grassland ecosystems and communities in Saskatchewan, Montana and Alberta.

This initiative provides a means to connect people from Tribes/First Nations, governments, NGOs and the ranching community and creates a forum for enhancing the health of native grasslands, creating opportunities to conserve native grasslands in the three jurisdictions. They have held four annual workshops over the last four years in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana.

The recent focus has been on connectivity and ecosystem services across the transboundary region.



OUTREACH

Wild Lands Advocate

Wild Lands Advocate (WLA) is AWA's news journal; published four times a year, WLA is a vital source of information and perspective on Alberta's wilderness and its conservation. Its information is crucial to informing public debate in Alberta and inspiring the people of this province to care about the health of our landscapes and ecosystems. WLA's importance here is heightened by the mainstream media's diminished dedication to reporting on provincial environmental issues.

The magazine reports news and information about AWA's past, current, and future work. Between its covers you will find stories of Wild Alberta, the people involved in its conservation, and the state of AWA's numerous conservation campaigns. Free to all members, the WLA delivers its conservation message in a very accessible, visually attractive manner. AWA staff is leaders in shaping the content of WLA. Their contributions, plus those of skilled, thoughtful volunteers, create a product the Association is very proud of. During the past year the features section of the magazine offered readers informed commentary on issues from across the province. Climate change, Bighorn country, oil sands liabilities, woodland caribou conservation, biodiversity ambitions, and why we value our time in the outdoors were among the features we covered in the past year. Nature-inspired art, poetry, book reviews, and reports on Association activities such as the Climb for Wilderness complement our features. They make WLA well-worth the cost of a membership in the Alberta Wilderness Association and a valuable outreach tool to engage and inspire people about wilderness and wildlife in Alberta.

Online Presence

AWA contracts the services of Build Studio, a professional web development company with usability expertise, to provide support and maintenance for its public interface. A significant upgrade to the AWA websites was completed in the fall of 2015.

AWA began updating AWA's main website AlbertaWilderness.ca by reorganizing the website layout and creating/updating webpages for all 55 Area of Concern in 2018. As part of AWA's *Wild Spaces 2020* campaign (see *Protected Areas – Provincial* for more detail), AWA promoted its Areas of Concern by highlighting them on our social media platforms and driving the public to accurate and informative materials on our website.

AWA has two primary websites:

www.AlbertaWilderness.ca (major information and resource site)

www.ClimbforWilderness.ca (Earth Day event site)

and two single issue websites:

www.NoMoreGrizzlies.com

www.caribou4ever.ca

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

Media – 177 subscribers

Climb for Wilderness - 3,721 subscribers

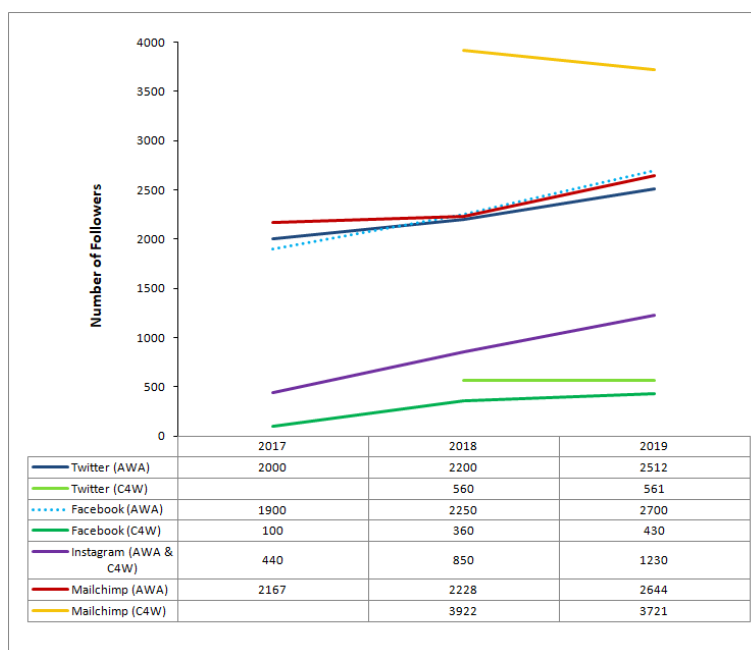
Alberta Wilderness Association – 2,644 subscribers



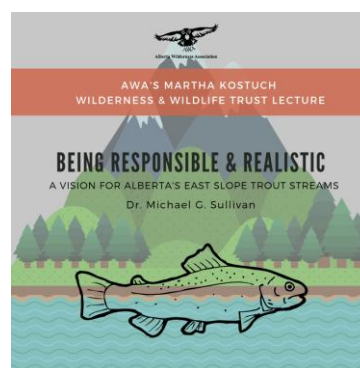
Social media

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

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



Social media is a cost effective and efficient way to develop brand recognition and increase AWA's reach to interested and engaged people. It provides a digital platform for outreach and messaging of important news. Major AWA social media campaigns throughout the past year included the Wild Spaces 2020 and Public Lands Campaigns, Bighorn Country, Wilderness Vote, and the Wild Alberta Interactive Map launch. When posts address controversial topics, we found Facebook in particular attracted misinformation and at times personal attacks. The AWA Facebook and Twitter accounts are also used to share news releases, events advertising and featured articles to help share relevant information on conservation in Alberta. Following are samples of some of our posts.





Hikes

AWA's hikes program continues to be successful. With hikes being held within a variety of locations throughout the province, AWA has explored many valuable wilderness areas, and introduced and increased awareness for many Albertans on the importance of healthy and thriving ecosystems. AWA's hike program is a crucial component of AWA's outreach work that also facilitates and builds important community-based relationships within our Areas of Concerns. This year AWA held hikes in the Porcupine Hills, Whaleback, Bighorn, Rumsey, Antelope Creek Ranch, Nose Hill Park (Calgary), Lakeland-Primrose, and a stewardship day on Plateau Mountain. All hikes were well received due to the tremendous efforts of many dedicated AWA volunteers, and were wonderful opportunities to emphasize the natural values of the region visited, while promoting the importance of healthy lifestyle choices for Albertans.

AWA is grateful for support from the Nose Hill Communities Board and the Calgary Parks Foundation that meant we successfully provided opportunities for 90 participants ranging in age from four years to 90 years, in four outings to Nose Hill Park. AWA's program of learning was provided with thanks to expert naturalist, geologist, botanist, and local historian contributions. The outings combined a little adventure and discovery with historical perspectives about the prairies as well as an understanding of the contribution today's grassland ecosystems make to our biodiversity and well-being. These children were on the hike and enjoyed perching on a glacial erratic – blustery weather didn't keep anyone from enjoying the hike and learning more about Nose Hill Park that day.





Exploring a sandstone boulder imbedded with fossils ©AWA

Talks

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

The 2018/2019 Calgary speakers included:

- John Marriot: *Tall Tales, Long Lenses*
- Regan Boychuk: *The (100) Billion Dollar Question – Abandoned Oil Wells*
- Jane Park: *Rekindling the Flame – Restoring Fire to Banff National Park*
- Ian Urquhart: *Promises Made – Climate Change, Coal & Clean Energy... a Retrospective on Alberta's Environmental Promises*
- Elly Knight: *Getting the Whole Picture: What we've learned by studying a declining, migratory bird – the common nighthawk – year round*
- Shirlee Matheson: *This Was Our Valley*
- University of Calgary Students: *Earth Wind & Fire (And Other Ecological Puzzles)*

Our increased commitment to ensure that a wide diversity of speakers is represented in our programming resulted in a stellar talks season and we commit to continuing to promote inclusivity in our speakers moving forward.

The 2018/2019 Edmonton speakers included:

- Ed Struzik: *Fire Storm – How wildfire will shape our future*
- Brian Eaton: *Friends of Elk Island Society*

AWA thanks the Wildbird General Store and Jackson Power for their support of the 2018/2019 Edmonton season and we look forward to an exciting *Talks* season across Alberta in the coming year.

AWA after Hours

AWA after Hours is the newest event series hosted by AWA to facilitate community building and conversation around Alberta's wildlife and wilderness areas. The events are styled as "out after work" meetups, each featuring one of Alberta's iconic species or spaces to help spread awareness and support for wilderness protection. This year, we hosted three *AWA after Hours* events including Caribrew (September), Pints & Peaks (December) and Sketch the Solstice



(June), bringing together 95 people and signing 24 new members. *Caribrew* was held at Born Colorado Brewery and involved a “crash course in caribou” by Carolyn Campbell; *Pints & Peaks* featured the Wild Spaces 2020 campaign and included holiday cider and festive ornament painting; and *Sketch the Solstice* brought in guest artist, Barbara Amos, who guided participants through a landscape sketching lesson while discussing the ecological value of Alberta’s native grasslands. The next event, *Watersheds, Wine & Cheese*, is scheduled for October 2019.

The events are primarily geared towards young adults, although all are welcome, and typically incorporate a short conservation “crash course” and activity (e.g. painting, sketching, or even wine tasting), while beer, wine and snacks are served. To encourage new audiences to attend, ticket prices have been kept deliberately low (between \$5 and \$15).



Local artist, Barbara Amos, leading a landscape sketching class at
AWA after Hours: Sketch the Solstice

Music for the Wild

AWA’s Music for the Wild series combines a celebration of music and Alberta’s wildlife and wild spaces. It aims to broaden AWA’s community outreach and messaging by drawing in a demographic of the population that may not be familiar with AWA’s work.

The 2018/2019 season marked the 11th year of the program:

- October 20: Magnolia Buckskin; Opening Act Murray Fitch and Friends
- November 17: Jeremy Gignoux Acoustic Ensemble; Opening Act The Project
- February 2: Charlie Ewing and Bob Blair; Opening Act The Still Waters
- March 2: Christie Simmons; Opening Act Brand New Companions

Each evening includes a short introduction to AWA and a story about a current conservation activity. These fun evenings have brought an appreciation of AWA’s wilderness work to a wide-ranging audience. AWA looks forward to a successful season in the following year and thanks our steadfast volunteers, George Campbell and Murray Little, for continuing to put together and run this fabulous series.

Earth Day – Climb for Wilderness

The Climb for Wilderness is a premiere community event celebrating *Earth Day*. The event began with a few interested folks who climbed the Calgary Tower and has grown steadily through the years. The Calgary event has a sister event at the CN Tower that the World Wildlife Fund sponsors each year; they are celebrating their 30th climb event in 2020; AWA will celebrate the 29th climb. The Calgary Climb for Wilderness was moved to the Bow Building in 2017 – the



event's 25th year. More stairs, a new building with an outer wall staircase and the ability to look out and see our wild spaces in the distance have made the move exceptionally popular.

Through the years, Calgary's mayors, including Ralph Klein, Prime Minister Joe Clark and many other dignitaries and luminaries have attended; climbing and supporting the Alberta Wilderness Association and the event. Cumulatively, more than 20,000 people have climbed in celebration of Earth Day and wilderness in Alberta and more than \$1,700,000.00 has been raised. The event is suited to folks of any age from babies in backpacks to 100 year olds and attracts participants from across North America. Almost 1,000 people including participants, volunteers and support staff and many more accompanying parents and supporters attend.

The Climb and Run for Wilderness is a family oriented athletic event which includes major additional components of education and opportunities to learn about the environment. It is a family day, a corporate challenge day, a fun time, and a serious opportunity to test one's personal best.

Our oldest climber is Dr. Richard Guy from the University of Calgary, Department of Mathematics; now 103 years old, he does not climb all the stairs but does a number of flights. He tells his friends and sponsors who give generously to support his climb that there isn't much good to be done by climbing stairs but it is the gesture showing that one cares and wants to make a difference. One of our most faithful and dedicated supporters is now 10 year old Abigail Hadden who has been a top fundraiser in her age category for 8 years. She collects returnable bottles and cans and does other chores and finds ways to earn money to support her climb each year. One of the really amazing things is to see the leadership this event encourages in young and old alike. Even youngsters like Abigail bring their friends and class mates to climb for wilderness and learn more about Alberta wilderness and wildlife.

The event attracts all major media outlets; we have plenty of good news stories and interviews that day! As well a number of corporate supporters help make this event exceptional; the websites, AlbertaWildernss.ca and ClimbforWilderness.ca list supporters and sponsors.

In 2019, more than 800 people enjoyed a very successful event. For the first time we were required to pay a rental fee for the use of the Bow Building on the day of the event and regrettably without corporate support our event as we have known it may be in jeopardy. There is very real possibility we may not have permission to use the venue for 2020. Despite the adversity, AWA's resilience will help find a way to reinvent this amazing Earth Day celebration.



Community Relationships

Throughout the year, AWA participated in a wide range of community events, including conferences, workshops and talks. Examples include participation and attendance at various ENGO AGMs, planning meetings and forums, including North Saskatchewan, Bow River, Red Deer River and other watershed alliances; participation in Southern Foothills community meetings, presentations to school groups, various community groups, and more. AWA was active in the wider community, putting up displays at markets and specialized events. AWA also hosted two practicum experiences for students from SAIT and another from Robertson College. We welcomed Helene Eckardt for a practicum from her school in Kassel, Germany and we were able to include her in a number of opportunities to learn more about our association. Staff completed numerous student requests for information and assistance. All of these events and activities are important outreach opportunities to engage with the community and raise awareness.

AWA received support from Nature Canada for three social media campaigns: Wild Spaces 2020, AWA's 2019 *Get Outdoors* hikes program, and a newly developed Sage Grouse educational program. This partnership with Nature Canada has provided opportunities to engage new audiences and explore different avenues through funded social media advertisements. We will continue to partner with Nature Canada in the year to come, when mutually beneficial opportunities arise.



AWA Staff and Practicum Student from Germany enjoyed an excellent interpretive day at Blackfoot Crossing © AWA

Strength and Capacity

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

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

Volunteers are crucial to our success. Volunteers help with on the ground protection of wilderness, office assistance, office and garden maintenance, and organization of and participation in events such as talks and hikes, benefit concerts, casino fundraising, the Climb for Wilderness, and the Wild West Saloon. AWA has 102 (2018 - 119) active volunteers at the time of writing this report.

Roger Creasey Wilderness Resource Centre

Wilderness Resource Centre archiving and cataloguing continued to move forward this year. Our on-line catalogue database is partially developed, development and growth of the Electronic Wilderness Resource Centre (EWRC) has continued. Our objective to have top of the line technology and storage capacity, is in place.

Identifying and removing duplicate files/images on EWRC-M is an ongoing challenge. As we continue to work on the media library, we will add tags, metadata and comments so categorization of files to assist when looking for a specific item.

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

AWA's Cottage School

AWA's Cottage School has been a busy place this year with opportunities to host partners AGM's and programs. Depending on the event and users, we sometimes charge rent for the use of the venue and provide an in-house staff member whenever guests are using the building.

General maintenance and upkeep for the building is ongoing and in that realm two exterior doors that were not fitting well were repaired in one case and replaced in the other with a custom built door to remain as close to heritage and period appearance as possible.



We are grateful to Virtuoso Energy for the installation and operationalizing solar panels and related equipment donated by Suncana Energy to provide some of our electricity. We have at times contributed to the grid and feel making this step into incorporating renewable energy into the Cottage School has provided an excellent example and is important for future energy use. We are tracking usage and will have a sense of savings in the coming year.

Late in November 2018 we discovered the attic had been breached by a number of squirrels. Significant damage to the electrical system meant all the wiring in the attic had to be replaced, a new electrical panel was required and in total the bill for the repair work was close to \$25,000. Everything has been upgraded and taken care of. In addition to the damages by the squirrels, there were a number of code related issues with wiring done throughout the years. Wherever possible all incandescent and fluorescent bulbs were replaced with LED as part of the repairs. AWA is grateful to a number of donors who were contacted to help with the repairs and all these unexpected costs were covered by donations.



Solar Panel Installation required ropes and tie downs on the steep pitch of
AWA's Cottage School – 2019 © D. Olson



Financing Wilderness Protection

Funds received from donations by members, supporters and fundraising efforts are vital to the health of AWA and provided 77% (2017-2018 - 83%) of our total revenue. Granting agencies in this year included Alberta Government Recreation and Physical Activity Division, ECO Canada, The Harmony Foundation and the United Nations Green Corp and Green Spaces Program. Funding generated through events came from our annual Earth Day event Climb for Wilderness and the Wild West Saloon in the fall. Shell Canada, CIBC and Jones and Salt provided cash sponsorships for the Wild West Saloon. A more detailed presentation thanking our corporate supporters who largely provide in-kind support is listed on our website under the About Us, Supporters section. Fundraising and gifts from donors allow AWA to be financially independent and free to speak out for wilderness protection without risk of compromise as a result of funding considerations. We continue to work on our target to strengthen our financial reserve. We are building a fund for building maintenance and repair.

Another achievement to be proud of came from a review of our operations by Charity Intelligence, a Canadian watchdog for charities. They have given AWA an **A and a four star rating**. This is significant recognition for AWA; one of the top 100 charities.

AWA devoted 73% (2017-2018 - 76%) of its cash expenditures to wilderness stewardship, conservation, and outreach. This includes funding the Alberta Wilderness Resource Centre. Development costs include expenses incurred in developing our core values, and creating broader awareness of the association and its mandate, "Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action." This category includes the cost of seeking more members and supporters as well as applying for grants. General and Administrative costs of 17% (2017-2018 - 12.5%) continue to represent an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism. Overlap in bookkeeping staff during the transition to new staff and moving banking to the CIBC from CWB accounts for some of the increase in this category. The increase was largely due to expenses for replacing electrical wiring damaged by squirrels.

Our voting membership has grown in the past year and stands at 5947 (2018 - 5,792) individuals; representing 208 (2018 - 211) communities in Alberta, in addition to national and international members. We seek and welcome new members and supporters on an ongoing basis..

Review Engagement Report

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

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Legacy Circle

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



Bequests

It is the Board of Directors' hope that individuals, members, and supporters will make a bequest in their will naming a gift to AWA. Bequests make a significant difference to our long-term security and our ability to plan for the future. We have prepared an information sheet, readily available on our website to assist those interested in planning a gift for AWA.

Wilderness and Wildlife Bequests

Daphne M. Smith 1980

Dr. James Birkett Cragg 1997

Anna Nowick 1999

Myrtle Muriel Koch 2001

Ian Ross 2003

Dorothy Barry 2003

William Mayer 2004

Diane Hughes 2005

Harold deVries 2009

Ann Roberts 2009

Richard Collier 2013

Harriet Ruth Mowat 2016

Kim Bennett 2016

Carol A. Haines - 2017

Wendy Williams – 2017

Herbert G. Kariel - 2017

Ted Davy - 2018

Richard Pharis - 2018

Del Lavalley - 2019



Lifetime Giving

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

AWA's Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors

Dorothy Berry & the Berndt Family

Clint and Julie Docken

Lorne Fitch

Anthony and Liz Fricke

Bruce and Eveline Goodall

Donna Hammerlindl

Chris and Ken Havard

Laura Jackson

Linda and Jusuf Javeri

Mary Kettenbach

David and Cathy Mayhood

Diane and Kevin Mihalcheon

Glen and Lois Mumey

Rosemary Nation

Christyann Olson

Richard and Vivian Pharis

Chris and Jennifer Saunders

Joe Vipond and Family

Cliff and Terry Wallis



Memorial Tributes

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

Donations in Memoriam 2018 – 2019

Ray Sloan 1941-1996
 Dick Pharis 1937-2018
 P.K. Anderson 1927-2014
 Troy Hommy 1962-2018
 Chris Havard 1945-2015
 Del Lavalley 1924-2018
 Joan (2009) & Mel (2008) Dunford
 Laura McNaughton 1933-2018
 Peter Winters 1929-2018
 Jim Uffelmann 1959-2017
 Marilyn McKinley 1955-2005
 Gorham Hussey 1931-2018
 Richard Secord Sr. 1933-2018
 Jordan Moore 1984-2019
 Janet Morgan de Bruyn 1954-2019
 Eirlys John 1926-2019
 Brendan O'Shea 1986-2006
 Roy D. Bishop
 Larry Cameron
 Faris Evans 1934-2019
 A.J. Adam Kolla 1985-2019
 Ross St. John 1930-2019
 Gord Nelson
 Dan Lee 1955-2019
 Cyrus Spaulding 1956-2017
 Weslyn Mather 1945-2015
 Charles A. Miller 1921-2009
 Roy Weatherley 1937-2018
 George Pumble 1928 - 2018
 Ernie Drake 1946 - 2018
 Leroy Church 1931-2019
 Roger Creasey 1953-2012
 Claire Falls 1952-2019
 Paul Potapoff 1922-2019
 R. David Petterson 1948 - 2014
 Orval Pall 1951-1986
 Dale McRae 1929-2019
 John Glenn Robinson 1940-2019
 Glen Warnke 1954-2019
 Sally McLean 1954-2019



Recognition for Outstanding Individuals

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

Gus Yaki
Margaret Main
Emily Andras
Grandma Sweet
Lance Hommy
Leo McGoldrick
Cleve Wershler
Ina Spaulding and John Bargman
Winnifred Lehman

Recognizing Youth Supporters

From time to time throughout the years AWA has been the fortunate recipient of gifts from children. We have received everything from birthday money to lemonade stand proceeds. During this year the following youth helped AWA and we recognize them here with sincere thanks.

Avani Sidhu and Isabelle Hu - Cupcake Sales
Isabel Lau - Birthday Money
Justin Konoff - Birthday Money
Abigail Hadden - Original Art Cards Sales
Kensington Clean Up Club
Almadina School - Grade 7 Fundraising Carnival
Owen Duke - Lemonade Stand Sales

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust

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

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



research that contribute to the protection, understanding, and appreciation of wilderness, wild waters, and wildlife.

The fund balance has not grown significantly but is a tribute to numerous small donations from concerned individuals. Today the balance is \$28,788(2018 - \$28,043). The endowment fund's annual distribution \$1075 (2018– \$1,122) is dedicated to covering the costs of the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture and the Wilderness Defender Awards.

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust Guest Lecture

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

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

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

The 2018 lecture was given by Michael Sullivan. Michael challenged and entertained a full house last November giving members an insight into native trout and the need to share. An article, about Michael Sullivan's Martha Kostuch Annual Lecture was published in the March 2019 *Wild Lands Advocate*. Ian Urquhart wrote "Michael Sullivan's passion and optimism were inspirational. His lecture was as invigorating as the mountain streams in the Willmore he and his daughter waded through. Sharing often is difficult, not least when choices have to be made between highly valued activities and attributes. That is the situation we face now with respect to our economic dependence on forestry and our love of fishing and native trout. If he is right and we can only have two of those three, the choice comes down to whether it will be the fishing status quo or native trout (since government already has decided forestry will be one of the three). Here, as a fisherman who hopes to share this love with his grandchildren, I hope we will listen to Michael's advice. Select a few watersheds, creatively apply the sanctuary concept, and see if the successes seen in Alberta's lake fisheries can be replicated in our trout streams. The prize is one I'm willing to share for."

Wilderness Defenders Awards

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



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

Wendy Ryan has always been a vital defender of wilderness and since she moved to the Pincher Creek area in the 1970s she has stood up for wild spaces and the wildlife that depend on it. Her childhood on the family farm near Brooks, working with her father to care for horses and the land, inspired Wendy to become a prominent member of the local community that fought for more than 40 years to protect the Castle Wilderness. Throughout the years she has been a tireless weed puller, garbage picker and teacher for so many who didn't realize the impact recreation and industrial activity could have. Wendy knows most if not all the trails of the Crown of the Continent and is tireless in her efforts for better stewardship by all. With the formal creation of the Castle parks Wendy's knowledge and efforts help ensure the parks are well-managed, grasslands are protected, and that a new generation of activists will continue to carry the stewardship torch in southwest Alberta.

Alberta's generous public education system gave Dave Mayhood the rare privilege to work as a freshwater scientist throughout western Canada, doing fieldwork in some of the most heartbreakingly beautiful landscapes anywhere on earth. In appreciation for that opportunity given by his fellow citizens, he has fought with them to retain the best, most essential parts of the areas he knows best, as wilderness for the benefit of the public. His donated time and expertise includes pro bono, volunteer, or limited compensation independent research, writing, representation and testimony for numerous Canadian environmental and landowners groups, including AWA, Y2Y, CPAWS, Rocky Mountain Ecosystem Coalition, Timberwolf Wilderness Society, various ad hoc citizen groups, underfunded government agencies and university environmental departments, not to mention public interest interventions under his own name. He reminds us that, as our First Nations have long known and our scientists have been discovering in their own way, wilderness is not just nice to have: it is essential to have. We literally cannot live without it. He reminds his fellow scientists that advocacy is an essential part of science. Scientists have an explicit obligation to fight for what they have shown to be true.

Great Gray Owl Awards

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

2010 marked the launch of AWA's *Great Gray Owl Award*. Inspired in particular by three outstanding women and the significant contribution they have made over the past several years, this award will be presented annually as individuals meet the high standard of volunteerism, dedication and commitment of these inaugural award winners. Anne Fabris, Linda Javeri and Margaret Main were the 2010 recipients of the award. Ed Hergott, tireless supporter of our outreach program and events, received the award in 2011. Paul Sutherland and Nuno Fragoso were awarded the Great Gray Owl in 2013 and in 2014 we recognized Heather Crone. Bob Blaxley accepted our award in 2015 and in 2016 we were honoured to present the award to Heinz Unger. In 2017 we honoured longstanding and dedicated volunteer Kevin Mihalcheon and in the fall of 2018 we recognized George Campbell and Murray Little for their untiring dedication and 10 years of service presenting the Music for the Wild Program.



After a successful career in Alberta's oil and gas industry and as a consultant, Saskatchewan native Murray Little began channeling his talent and love for music to help many demographics across Calgary's community; he has had a profound impact on many lives. Murray's friendship with fellow musician and AWA member George Campbell spurred an immediate connection with AWA's work, and he has been an essential part of many fundraising and advocacy campaigns. AWA is thankful for the untiring and dedicated support from Murray.

Throughout the years, George Campbell has supported AWA and promotes the importance of Alberta's wilderness and conservation by means of the Music for the Wild and Climb for Wilderness events. George's musical passion and talent continues to create a delightful atmosphere that engages individuals to have a more profound respect for the environment and highlights the important work of the ENGO community in contributing to the protection of Alberta's wilderness.



William Michalsky (1920-1996), Wilderness Defender Award – 2002 © AWA

A Year in Review - Infographics

2018 2019 | ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION YEAR IN REVIEW

THANK YOU!

THIS YEAR OUR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS DONATED \$455,981 WHICH SUPPORTED OUR WORK ON...

INCLUDING
125 VOLUNTEERS
WHO DONATED
>3000 HOURS

16
PRESENTATIONS

575+
ATTENDEES

WILD SPACES

THROUGH PRESENTATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA, WE WORKED TO INSPIRE COMMUNITIES TO CARE ABOUT ALBERTA'S PUBLIC LANDS AND PROTECTED AREAS.

WILDLIFE

WE CONTINUED THE SEEK HABITAT PROTECTIONS FOR WOODLAND CARIBOU, AND SAW BULL TROUT AND ATHABASCA RAINBOW TROUT LISTED UNDER THE FEDERAL SPECIES AT RISK ACT.

WILD WATERS

WE RAISED PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ACTION FOR FORTRESS MOUNTAIN RESORT'S PROPOSED WATER LICENSE CHANGE TO SELL MOUNTAIN WATER TO A BOTTLING FACILITY.



2018–2019

NEWS AND CAMPAIGNS



MILK RIVER RIDGE

EXPANSION AND REDESIGNATION PROPOSED FOR THE
TWIN RIVER HERITAGE RANGELAND NATURAL AREA.

DESPITE BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT,
THE CHANGE NEVER GOES THROUGH.

WILDERNESS
ROAD SHOW

AWA CONSERVATION STAFF TOUR ALBERTA,
TALKING TO COMMUNITIES ABOUT ALBERTA'S
PUBLIC LANDS AND PROTECTED AREAS.

BIGHORN COUNTRY

FOLLOWING THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL,
AWA'S LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN GAINS 920
SIGNATURES IN SUPPORT OF BETTER PROTECTION
AND PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT IN THE BIGHORN.

CARIBOU COURT CASE

FIRST NATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS,
INCLUDING AWA, LAUNCH A LAWSUIT TO PROTECT
AT-RISK BOREAL CARIBOU.

WILDERNESS VOTE

AWA LAUNCHES A CAMPAIGN ENCOURAGING
ALBERTANS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROVINCIAL
ELECTION AND CONSIDER EACH PARTY'S STANCE
ON CONSERVATION ISSUES.

WILD ALBERTA
INTERACTIVE MAP

THE WILD ALBERTA INTERACTIVE MAP LAUNCHES,
FEATURING WILD SPACES IN ALBERTA'S SIX
NATURAL REGIONS.

AUG 2018



FALL 2018



NOV 2018



JAN 2019



MAR 2019



JUL 2019



THIS YEAR WE HOSTED

12 HIKES
AND **163 HIKERS**



HIKES

LAKELAND
PRIMROSE

PLATEAU
MOUNTAIN

BIGHORN
RAM RIDGE

PORCUPINE
HILLS

RUMSEY

WHALEBACK

NOSE HILL
PARK

ANTELOPE
CREEK RANCH

EVENTS

3154 PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN **71** EVENTS AND MEETINGS



MUSIC FOR
THE WILD

CLIMB FOR
WILDERNESS

AUTUMN
SPLENDOR

TUESDAY
TALKS

WILD WEST
SALOON

COFFEE WITH A
CONSERVATIONIST

ELECTION
FORUMS

AWA AFTER
HOURS

WE RAN **4** MAJOR
CAMPAIGNS THIS YEAR



SOCIAL MEDIA

ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS

WE GAINED

1142

NEW FOLLOWERS!



Hope for Tomorrow

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

*AWA is an association built on hope and
I am so privileged to have known and
to have been part of that hope!*

- Christyann Olson



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