

How Many Bucks Does it Take?



By Christyann Olson, *AWA Executive Director*

The year 2019 – 2020 brought unprecedented change and unexpected challenges. As we reflect on the year that's behind us and write this report, we are thankful. We are thankful for our many supporters and the challenges that moved us to be resilient, healthy, and strong in pandemic times. Throughout AWA's 55 years, but perhaps especially through this year, you have made a positive difference. With your help we have managed financially and emotionally in these past difficult months to stay strong and to keep all our staff working and responding to conservation concerns.

Fifty- five years later... so much has been achieved. Yet, there are days where we're disappointed that we haven't seen more substantial change, more measurable proof, of the difference we make. Make no mistake though, we are making a difference.

In this year, conservation staff completed a massive review of our extensive website. This required updating pages, developing content, and providing historical records for more than 53 Wild Spaces – does it make a difference? *Yes!* Not long ago a government employee told us: "AWA's website is the most valuable resource we have to understand what has happened in this area."

Our Outreach Program – teaching about wilderness, wildlife, and healthy living – has been ongoing for years. This year we put the finishing touches on our *Adventures for Wilderness* Program. The program has been tremendously successful – far more successful than we imagined. People can create, join or support an Adventure. Our 27 Adventures included everything from extreme activities to learning about gardening under the Chi-

nook Arch, to learning about pollinators and adding 65 native bee nesting boxes throughout the province. We are truly pleased with the success of the program. Four hundred and thirty-eight participants and more than 600 sponsors made our new program so successful that we needed to develop internal resources to handle registrations and sponsorships in a more effective way. Sean Nichols, our Program Specialist, has taken the lead on developing those resources and this program. People are excited and they are developing ideas and creating more Adventures for the months and years to come. Thanks in large part to your enthusiasm we have developed a very successful outreach program.

Our Conservation staff has been working on some very difficult issues. Carolyn Campbell, our expert staff person on the caribou file, and board member Cliff Wallis have worked with the government of Alberta on Caribou Range Task Forces for more than a year now. Carolyn recently raised the public profile of a very quiet announcement from Jasper National Park: the Maligne caribou herd is extirpated. That initiative has led to steps to work with the National Park and others to recover the Park's caribou populations. We manage and maintain a separate website on caribou at www.Caribou4Ever.ca to help provide better awareness of the plight of caribou in Alberta.

The Government of Alberta's announcement that it will remove 164 sites from Alberta's provincial parks system sparked an outpouring of engagement with members. We have developed excellent Briefing Notes and spoken with hundreds of members who have written or called their MLA. We remain hopeful that the government will re-think

their decision. There is no doubt that this decision sacrifices protection. Grace Wark is our Conservation Specialist taking the lead on this file. She has created an air of urgency about the need to retain these protected areas and has inspired people to let elected officials know why these areas are important to them.

A resurgence in applications to explore and strip mine for metallurgic coal is putting formerly protected areas in jeopardy. On June 1st, the government rescinded the 1976 Coal Policy without any public discussion (but...the government did discuss this change with the Coal Association of Canada). This policy change opens up much of the Eastern Slopes to strip mining. For more than five years now, we have worked to oppose a mine at Grassy Mountain in the Crowsnest Pass and a Joint Review Panel is evaluating this application (a public hearing into the project started on October 27th). AWA has full participation in this hearing and, along with the Grassy Mountain Group of landowners, was represented in the proceedings by the legal firm of Ackroyd Law. The decision from this panel promises to be precedent setting. The fates of a number of other applications likely are waiting for the outcome of this hearing. Nissa Petterson, Conservation Specialist, and Ian Urquhart, Conservation Director, are taking the lead on outreach and helping people understand the issues.

We have devoted time to many wildlife issues over the year. They include native trout, grizzly bears, sandhill cranes, and greater sage-grouse. We are part of a monitoring project for the recovery of Athabasca rainbow trout in Apetowun Creek after the catastro-

ic Obed Mine spill. Joanna Skrajny, Conservation Specialist devoted significant time and effort to working with multi-stakeholder groups developing recovery strategies and plans for Alberta's native trout. Earlier this year the legal case we planned to intervene in between the Government of Canada and the City of Medicine Hat/LGX Oil and Gas was dismissed. The challenge against Canada's *Species at Risk Act* Emergency Protection Order (EPO) for greater sage-grouse was dropped. While we were confident we would have helped successfully defend the EPO, we no longer have to prepare for that legal case.

Public Lands sales have been an issue for a very long time in Alberta. At the core of the concept of public lands is the belief that the public has access to enjoy those lands in the province. Public Lands sales threaten that freedom; so too do land use regulations allowing lease holders to control access to those lands. Sales that would convert native grasslands to agricultural lands (for crops such as potatoes) represent one particularly egregious initiative. AWA is constantly on the watch for, and opposing, any such initiative. We were unsuccessful in stopping one such sale this year and have been alerted to plans for another that we will oppose. Any conversion of native prairie to crops is unacceptable since our native prairie and the habitat it offers many endangered species is threatened so seriously.

We have collaborated and cooperated with many groups over the past year. AWA chaired the International Great Plains Conservation Network and spearheaded the formation of an informal provincial Coal Policy Working Group in Alberta. In February, I participated in a Day for Nature organized by our colleagues at Nature Canada on Parliament Hill. Grace Wark, Conservation Specialist, has taken a leadership role with the Prairie Conservation Forum and has been an important contributor to the Connecting Corridors and State of the Prairie committees. I am on the Board of Directors for Prairie Conservation Forum. Nissa leads the Alberta Environment Network Water Caucus and Carolyn takes a leadership role for a regional Caribou ENGO committee and participates in a national Caribou ENGO group.

AWA's on the ground research in the Bighorn area of the province was completed this July. A comprehensive report of the years 2012 -2017 to complement earlier reports was completed and a synthesized report for the general public is nearing completion and will be available on our website. Throughout the years we found that off highway vehicle use on the Bighorn's Hummingbird Trail System has damaged the health of local ecosystems. We hope the report and data will help others researching similar issues and making decisions about where trails should be constructed.

Our Wild Lands Advocate magazine edited by Ian Urquhart is produced four times each year and receives praise and accolades from all who read the excellent articles. Each issue is delivered to 2,200 individuals and more than 900 access the magazine on line. The June issue featured stories from people throughout the province who wanted to tell us why their favorite wild place was important and needed to remain part of our protected areas network. Indeed, more than ever it seems, the voice and insistence of individuals are needed to convince and influence decision makers to respect the input of stakeholders and experts alike.

And so how many bucks does it take to achieve this work and make this difference? Even though our major fundraising event the Climb for Wilderness was transformed into a new outreach program, Adventures for Wilderness and the Covid pandemic impacted donor gifts from March through July, donor gifts and fundraising still provided 70 percent of our total revenue (\$689,494.). General and administrative costs of 15 percent continue to merit our status as an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism. Another 15 percent was devoted to Development and included seeking new members, applying for grants, and creating a broader awareness of AWA's mission to inspire people to care about wilderness and wildlife. AWA devoted 70 percent of its budget this past year to wilderness stewardship, conservation, and outreach. This includes funding the Alberta Wilderness Resource Centre.

When it comes to AWA's wealth, it isn't possible to separate financial wealth and resources from human resources; each one of you who read this, donors, volunteers, board members and the outstanding staff who work tirelessly as your team. From AWA's humble beginnings to the strong force it is today, there is no question we are about people. Our membership has grown and stands at 6,122 voting members with an additional brigade of more than 1,500 supporters who are not members but donate funds to ensure our strength. Our members may be found in 213 Alberta communities, across Canada and around the world. Your heartfelt notes of encouragement really do make a difference, please keep them coming!

I'm sure you know your donations are carefully invested in AWA's work and no matter how small or large the gift, it is sincerely appreciated and means we can continue to work towards the healthy wilderness legacy we hope to leave. Evidence of the confidence you can have in AWA came from an achievement we are very proud of – 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 rated charities in Canada. AWA was one of only two provincial organizations given this recognition.

Thank you for being part of the AWA team! 🍀

Bequests, Memorial Tributes, and Recognizing Outstanding Individuals

Wilderness and Wildlife Bequests

Individuals, members, and supporters making a bequest in their will naming a gift to AWA are helping make a difference to long-term security and AWA's ability to plan for the future.

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 Lavallee - 2019
Meyer Estate - 2019
Doris Davy - 2019
Helen Dixon - 2020

Memorial Tributes

AWA is honoured to receive memorial tributes from family and friends; we remember those gifts and individuals here.

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
Charles A. Miller 1921-2009
Joan Dunford 2009
Mel Dunford 2008
Raymond Sloan 1996
Weslyn Mather 2015
David & Murray Manzer
Helen Dixon 1920-2019
Charlie Russell 1942-2018
Jim Burton 1960-2020
Bill Laidlaw 1936-2020
David Eriksson 2019
David Pritchard 2019
Jasmine and Aliyah 2019
Christina Havard 1944-2015
Wilbur Tripp 1931-2020
Margaret Hougan 1932-2020
PK. Anderson 2014
Wilfred & Brenda McQuaid
Barry Fellows 1956-2020
Calvin McLaren 1970-2020
Margaret Main 1935-2020
Murielle Carlson 1960-2020
Gus Yaki 1932-2020
Greg Johnston 1951-2020
Gerrit Brolsma 1935-2020
Nancy Allison 1941-2020
Harry Taylor 1941-2020
Richard Guy 1916-2020
Emma McPhail
Earla Rudd
Ron Prokosch
Murray Vines
Ann Savage 1929-2020
Betsy Nicholls
Russell Wells 1926-2020
Sharon Henderson 1943-2018
Mary S. Lore 1921-2019

Recognition For Outstanding Individuals

AWA is honoured to receive throughout the year donations from friends and families made to honour outstanding individuals and their accomplishments.

This year's tributes recognize:

Johanna Buchman-Duck
Cleve Wershler
Bruno Canadien
Cliff Wallis
Sebastian and Milo Brennan
Jennifer Graham
Marion Rogers
Esther Kienholz
Blair Porter
Lindsay and Alex
Gus Yaki
Aileen Pelzer
Laurence Marks
Mark Jackson
Yaro Horachek
Carolyn Peterson
Will Cunningham
Jill Seaton
Kevin Van Tighem
Madison McGinnis
Linda Duncan
Peter Duck
Barbara Buchmann