

A WILDLANDS ADVOCATE



THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

SUMMER 2021

The background of the cover is a full-page photograph of a mountain landscape. In the foreground, three hikers are seen from behind, walking along a gravelly mountain trail. They are wearing backpacks and outdoor gear. The trail leads towards a vast mountain range with rugged, rocky peaks and patches of snow. A blue lake is visible in the distance on the right side. The sky is filled with white clouds.

Tributes to
Christyann Olson

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Cover Photo

Jerry Osborn took this photo from Tent Ridge during one of the COVID-19 inspired local hikes he describes later. As his son told him, the panorama looks like a scene from Lord of the Rings
PHOTO: © G. OSBORN

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ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

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

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Featured Art Albertine Crow Shoe

Albertine Crow Shoe • Blackfoot Jeweler/Artist • Bull Plume Studio
Connectivity is at the heart of Albertine Crow Shoe's practice as Jeweler/Artist, drawing on her Indigenous background. She is a traditional knowledge keeper in her community. Ms. Crow Shoe is a full time Jeweler/Artist, born and raised on the Piikani Nation part of the Blackfoot Confederacy in Southern Alberta. Albertine received her formal training from Alberta College of Arts (Arts University) and holds a Bachelor's degree in Management from the University of Lethbridge. Ms. Crow Shoe incorporates Blackfoot symbolism and designs into her work that bring Blackfoot culture to the non-native world. These images invoke memory and history. Through her work, she has gained recognition as the first Indigenous female to be offered Artist in Residence and a solo show at the Glenbow Museum (in 2019). This year she was juried into the Santa Fe Indian Market, one of the most prestigious and largest art shows in the United States and Canada, that is exclusive to Native Americans and First Nations peoples. Representations of her work are in the permanent collections at the Glenbow Museum and the Royal Alberta Museum. Her pieces have also been chosen to be part of shows with Alberta Craft Council and at the Royal Alberta Museum. Ms. Crow Shoe has mentored under master silversmiths from the Navajo Nation in Arizona and New Mexico. Albertine is a leader in her field as a First Nation's silversmith in Alberta.

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About Those Chills in Alberta's Air

Smoke from B.C.'s devastating wildfires isn't the only toxic substance polluting Alberta's air this summer. Another toxin rests in the efforts to make critics of government policy, at the very least, think twice before speaking their minds.

Alberta's "Public inquiry into anti-Alberta energy campaigns" (the Allan Inquiry) should be seen in this light. In its submission to the Inquiry, the Muttart Foundation said the design of the Allan Inquiry created a "climate of fear." The UCP government gave the Inquiry terms of reference that raised "fears amongst some about the 'price' to be paid for taking a position that is different than that of the government of the day."

Here I want to suggest we should be concerned about another front that may open up in the campaign to discourage the public from organizing and speaking out on issues that matter to them. That front is political advertising.

Should governments regulate political advertising? "Yes" is my answer to the question.

The public should know if so-called "big money" is throwing its weight into public policy making through advertising. Individuals or organizations that can raise hundreds of thousands of dollars with a view to spending it on political advertising should be required to register with Elections Alberta and identify their financial donors.

But, under Alberta law, any individual or organization that has spent or plans to spend more than \$1,000 on advertising that "takes a position on an issue" associated with a provincial party or politician must register with Elections Alberta as a Political Third Party Advertiser. The administrative requirements of registration aren't trivial, especially for individuals, volunteer groups, and many non-profits.

If the letter of the law is followed, any individual or organization that spends more than \$1,000 in advertising on virtually any issue (from the Premier's "Happy Father's Day" news release to the government's COVID-19 measures) should register with Elections Alberta as a political advertiser.

This is nuts.

Here are two reasons why I think this is crazy...and a threat to citizen participation in public life. The first goes to the definition of political advertising – the idea that it should cover anything that a party or politician has taken a position on. Section 44.1(1)(g) of the legislation defines political advertising. It refers to "advertising by the Government in any form" but only to EXCLUDE it from the definition. It's not political advertising. So... government ads praising changes to the K-6 curriculum wouldn't be political advertising but if a citizen wants to fund-raise to

run ads urging the government not to go ahead with those changes she should register as a Political Third Party Advertiser. This is why you'll find "A Very Concerned Albertan" on Elections Alberta's advertiser list. Commenting on government policy should only be considered political advertising if the policy praise or critique is phrased in explicitly partisan terms like "the proposed K-6 curriculum changes are dreadful, vote the scoundrels out."

My other point goes to Elections Alberta's implementation of the legislation. Is it being applied equally to all "political" advertising or is it

being applied disproportionately to groups that are viewed as opposed to the UCP government? If it's the latter, this is where the chill on public participation arises.

I know that Elections Alberta has contacted one of the groups opposed to coal mining on the Eastern Slopes to tell them that, by inviting people to donate towards erecting billboards with a "no coal mining" message, they appear to Elections Alberta to be a Political Third Party Advertiser.

This is because those billboards criticize

coal mining (they don't, to the best of my knowledge, urge people to vote the scoundrels out). Elections Alberta has requested they either register or explain why they don't meet the law's criteria. I don't know what the group ultimately will do, whether they will agree to register as a political advertiser or not. Will they stop asking people to purchase billboards that question government policy?

And what about the companies and organizations that take out "pro-coal mining" advertisements? Will Elections Alberta contact them about their advertisements? Should Montem Resources be required to register as a political advertiser for singing its praises in Pincher Creek's Shootin' the Breeze? Elan/Atrium Coal is behind responsiblemining.ca and, since this entity, also is advertising in southern Alberta newspapers and on billboards shouldn't it be required to register as a political advertiser? And, to cast the net a bit wider, what about organizations like Canada's Energy Citizens or the companies that have advertised their support for exploiting the tar sands or building oil sands pipelines? Aren't they political advertisers as well?

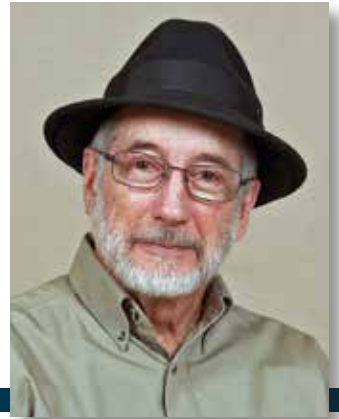
From the information I have seen, I worry that Alberta's political advertising legislation has not been or is not being applied impartially. Its implementation may contribute to the climate of fear the Muttart Foundation identified. This law and its interpretation needs to be improved to ensure it promotes, not discourages, the participation of Albertans in their province's public life.

- Ian Urquhart, Editor



Will Elections Alberta Demand that Strip-Mining Companies Register as Political Third Party Advertisers

Weathering the Pandemic in My Own Back Yard



By Jerry Osborn

If ever I go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own back yard.

– Dorothy, as spoken to Glinda, Good Witch of the North

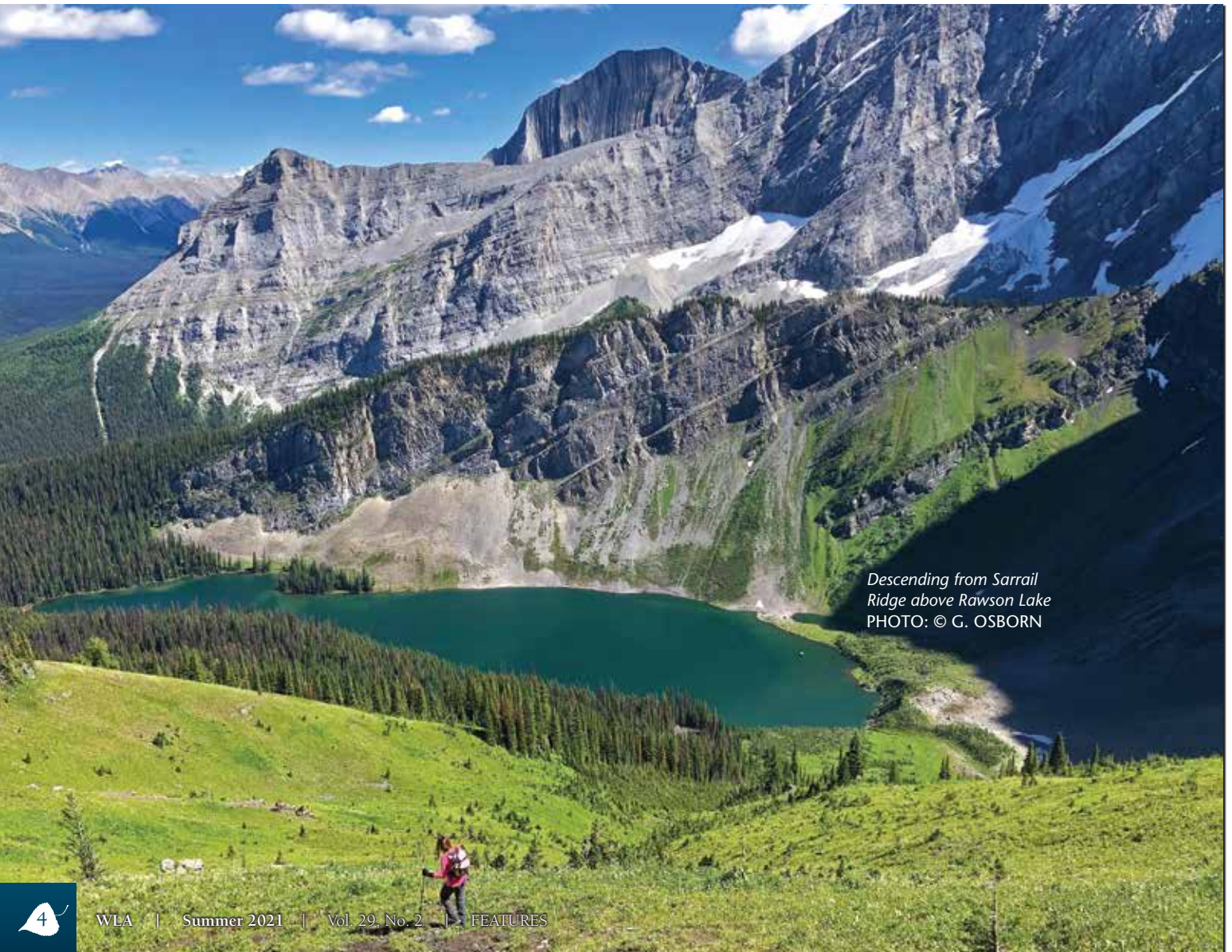
When Dorothy alluded to her back yard while recounting the lesson she learned in the Land of Oz, I don't think she was referring to a literal small square of lawn behind her Kansas farmhouse, surrounded by a picket fence and containing Toto's

doghouse and a swing set. She was leaning toward metaphor, telling us there are treasures to be discovered, experienced, close to home.

In my metaphorical back yard there are mountains. Sometimes when I see them I don't contemplate them enough. I've

scrambled over a lot of mountains in my summers, but for both recreational and geologic-research purposes I'm often in British Columbia or Washington state or California. In the summer of 2020 I had, in a way, a belated mountain epiphany.

Summer 2020 was the first summer of



Descending from Sarraill
Ridge above Rawson Lake
PHOTO: © G. OSBORN



Pocaterra Ridge in a September snowstorm PHOTO: © G. OSBORN

the pandemic (I had hoped I wouldn't have had to use "first" here). It was a summer of great social anxiety and chaos as people and institutions tried to figure out how to handle new problems they hadn't faced before, and not just health problems. People to a significant extent had to stay away from other people. Families took staycations. Businesses failed. Schools opened, and closed, and opened, and partly closed. Tellingly, folks in Calgary, after the first big lockdown, eased their physical and psychological constraints by taking to the river pathways and city natural areas on foot and on bikes, in such numbers and in such crowds that Mayor Nenshi was alarmed.

My response to the need to stay close to home was so natural I didn't know for a while that it was a response. In late March and April I walked a lot with walking friends on snowy Nose Hill and in Fish Creek Park and Bowmont Park in Calgary. I cross-country skied in Kananaskis and the Nordic Centre until the government closed the provincial parks. In May we made the first on-foot attempts on Front Range standards, such as Prairie Mountain (successful) and Powderface Ridge (too much snow). By June we could get onto ridges on day hikes. By July we could get onto high mountains on day hikes.

I didn't plan it ahead of time, but I hiked in the Alberta Rockies every weekend of

the summer and fall, except during my two-week road trip to the coast to visit my grandchildren. I visited places I had already been, like Buller Pass and Healy Pass, and discovered new (to me) places, like Smutwood Pass, Tent Ridge, Little Arethusa Peak, Sarraill Ridge. Even the places I had seen before were often "new" because of a different approach or different weather....especially different weather. We had difficulty keeping our feet in what seemed to be hurricane-force wind on the ridge up to Door Jamb Peak. An early gale-aggravated snowstorm on Pocaterra Ridge reduced the landscape to a mini-world of resplendent hostility. I was joined on almost all of these forays by my friend Priscilla, an immigrant from Brazil who grew up south of Sao Paulo in a landscape that has a few bumps we would call hills but didn't really know hiking was a thing, and has now been in Canada four years. She marveled at the first snowflakes of her life on her first day in Alberta. Just as a new parent rediscovers the world through the eyes of his or her toddler, I watched in wonder as Priscilla saw, smelled, and walked on her first mountains on a hike to both the Lake Agnes and Plain of Six Glaciers teahouses in her first month in Canada, and experienced the consequence of five subsequent days of sore muscles. I watched her gradually morph into a strong, capable, and passionate outdoorswoman. She doesn't

just appreciate mountains, but, as the late John Denver might have said, gets a Rocky Mountain high in them. She now while walking a ridgecrest on a descent, points down an inobvious line through rubble and cliff bands and dense forest and says "Let's go that way." She sends photos of the landscapes she traverses to the family back home who didn't know that landscapes like that actually exist in the world.

Other friends who joined some of the hikes – Mel, Janet, Louise, Alan, Jamie, Gemmie, Luiz, Dalton – have been at it longer, almost their whole lives in some cases. But they never get their fill of whatever it is they experience in the wilderness. One young hiking companion saw things from a slightly different perspective (see accompanying essay).

I came to appreciate two things last summer. The first realization germinated and flowered slowly. During the pandemic I wasn't exploring far reaches of the Kalahari Desert or squeezing through slots in the slickrock desert of Utah, I was just doing day trips out of Calgary. But I was "Out There." I was sweating profusely and muttering colourful words while slip-sliding in 40° dirt gullies on Sarraill Ridge or struggling on Ha Ling Peak with half-numb fingers to get boot spikes onto my boots before my fingers went totally numb. And then there was feeling the exhilaration of topping out on Mt. St. Piran

and the satisfying tiredness I felt when I got home.

The pandemic wasn't confining me; in a way it was expanding me, compelling me to really examine my own back yard and to see both large and small things I hadn't noticed before. It led me to challenge myself on difficult days and in the process share profound experiences with my friends. Masks might have been necessary back in the city, but when the whole Canadian Rockies airmass is caressing your face they're pointless. Deena Hinshaw's admonitions seemed a continent away.

The second "aha" moment was more precipitous. I was photographing the three women I was hiking with on the straight segment of Tent Ridge in Kananaskis (see this issue's cover photo). Looking back where we had come from was a long, straight, clean, graceful, airy crest, a magnificent crest, backed by spectacular peaks. Looking forward to where we were going was a panorama that my son later remarked looked like a scene out of Lord of the Rings.

This thought filled my mind on that reach of the ridge: how could I be so

lucky as to be here....what a privilege it is to be here. That morning I had woken up in a mass of teeming humanity serviced by Tim Hortons timbits and Starbuckian caramel lattes. Then I had worked physically hard, both sweating and chilling, sometimes at the same time, to get up the mountain. Now, here I was on top, feeling a monumental sense of freedom I can't easily frame in words, in some of the most magnificent scenery in the world. And then that evening I would be back amongst the timbits and the lattes. The contrast, the culture shock, was almost too much to grasp.

It was a delicious personal moment up on the ridge that day. But it also generated a more general, practical corollary.... that Albertans are blessed with the most spectacular mountains easily accessible from a city anywhere in North America. Durango, Colorado might be a reasonable second. Denver has a similar setting to Calgary but you can't get on spectacular peaks in Rocky Mountain National Park and get back in a day. Vancouver has its strong points, with a two-hour drive to Whistler, but the spectacular mountains

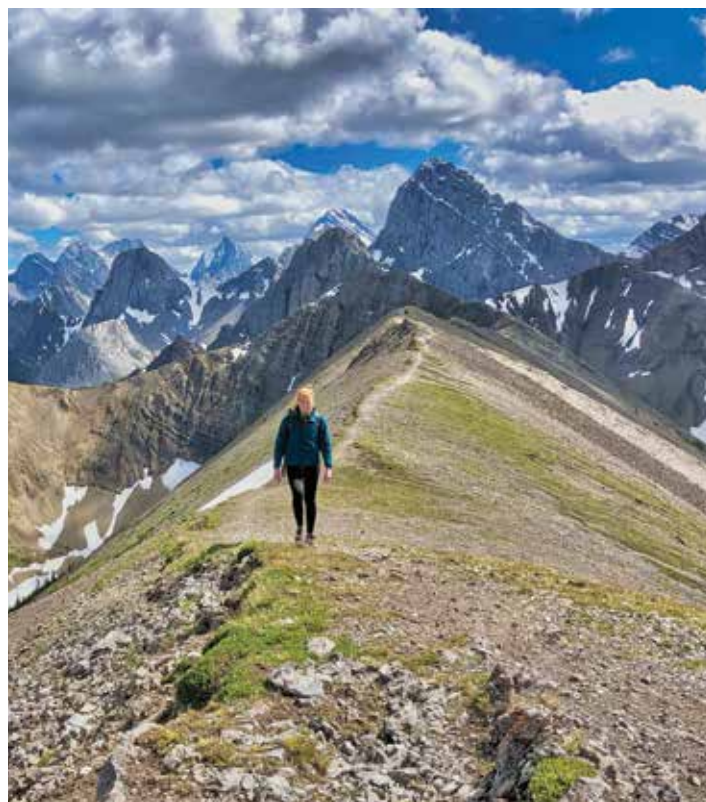
lie beyond that, accessible by backpacking or horse or helicopter. A one-day Seattle - Mt. Rainier round trip is kind of pointless, and the North Cascades are a long ways away. The Bugaboos and the Yosemite backcountry aren't close to cities. It's not that wilderness that takes a while to get to is a bad thing, it's a good thing. But during a pandemic you need a pharmacy that's handy.... dispensing beauty, inspiration, challenge, and tranquility without a prescription.

I have a new understanding of my back yard. It's a treasure, a transcendent resource for the psyche. It's a place where a questing soul like Dorothy could look for her heart's desire, if there were a back yard like that in Kansas. Joni Mitchell worries that "you don't know what you've got till it's gone." But I know what I've got and it's still there. I see it every day, out on the western horizon. 🌄

Jerry (Gerald) Osborn is Professor Emeritus of Geoscience at the University of Calgary. Jerry's photo, "Larch Valley Autumn, Banff National Park," was the overall winner in last year's Photographs for Wilderness contest.



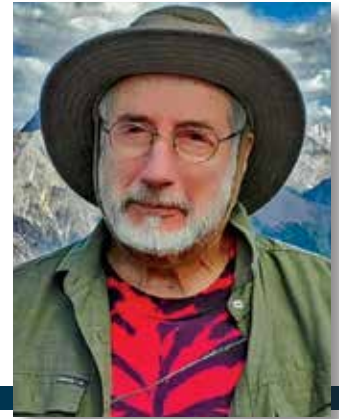
Ha Ling Divide in November PHOTO: © G. OSBORN



Looking back from whence we came on Tent Ridge PHOTO: © G. OSBORN

Young Eyes in the Wilderness

By Jerry Osborn



Emma Laskin, age 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ at the time of writing last year, discovered a fairy door. It's at the base of a tree in a spruce/pine forest a few hundred metres from her family home on the edge of Canmore. I've seen it and I have to admit it has all the appropriate qualities of a fairy door; I myself cannot conjure up a better hypothesis.

The door is a testament to Emma's powers of observation and her imagination, two things I admire about her. But she has another strength, which I recognized in the summer of 2020, when she and her mother Gemmie, along with my friend Priscilla, and I laboured up the trail to Stanley Glacier in Kootenay National Park. On the

lower part of the trail Emma propelled herself up to the flat bench, where I figured, wrongly, she would want to turn around. On the middle part of the trail she held her mother's hand as she managed the rough and rocky surface of the bench and the steep scree trail above, up to a shallow cave at the base of the Mt. Stanley cliff. I figured, wrongly again, that she definitely would want to turn around there. We went all the way up to the highest grove of conifers, on a bedrock shelf that marked the edge of the upper cirque floor. If Emma was tired we couldn't tell, because she was scampering over the shelf delighting in the smooth limestone bedrock which she took off her shoes to feel, and moss bordering the little

creek. And there was the local citizenry... she spotted a grouse and five chicks and saw her first marmot ("Mom! Enormous ground squirrel!!").

On the descent Emma stayed on her own two feet almost the whole way down. Where the trail improves dropping off the lower bench she rode on shoulders for a kilometre. Near the parking lot, by the bridge over Stanley Creek, she was on her feet again, after racking up 15 kilometres and 600 metres of elevation gain and then loss. There's a patch of ground there where the lodgepole pines are spread out with very little understory and the ground is a bit orangish from the volcanic ash deposited in the Rockies 8,000 years ago.



Fairy Door



Emma and her mother above Burstall Pass, 2020 PHOTO: © G. OSBORN

“It looks like the desert” she said....the spaced-out pines reminded her of cacti she had likely seen in pictures of the family camping in Baja a couple of years earlier. At 4 ½ years of age she was an embryonic outdoorswoman and an attentive, if not experienced, naturalist.

The story was repeated at Burstall Pass in Kananaskis three weeks later. Emma wasn’t spent at the pass, 7.5 kilometres in, so we climbed up to a rock knob on the flank of the peak north of the pass and then followed our own respective noses for a while. In our dispersed wanderings on that beautiful day I would occasionally catch sight of Emma off in the distance. The scene of that tiny figure, guided and protected by her mother, her only concession to childhood an Arctic-wolf stuffie named Whitey, walking over that huge, boundless, broken landscape seemed profound. She was far from the usual childhood comforts but she was comfortable. What was she seeing? What was she thinking? What was she imagining?

As children, we all see the view through a child’s eyes, but then we forget. There’s a story that circulates in Sierra Club circles about a mother who was very excited to show her 3-year-old daughter the Grand

Canyon. When they finally got to the rim, the kid barely glanced at the big hole. She was crouching down, getting close to the ground, examining the bugs and leaves and rocks within a 3 metre radius. At Stanley Glacier I’m not aware if Emma even looked at the glacier, but at the scale at which she is a specialist she saw many things I didn’t see. Furthermore, she saw them through a lens that does not clearly demarcate the literal from the enchanted. She still talks of that high bedrock knob as a magical place.

How does one get to be physically, mentally, and spiritually strong at a young age? The prime ingredients in this case are mentors, in the form of parents, and a wilderness to be young in. Emma’s dad David is a grizzly bear ecologist who works as a resource specialist in Banff National Park. Gemmie, her mom, is a geologist by training but a naturalist at heart. That they like the outdoors is something of an understatement. Emma ascended Moose Mountain at age 4 months (on her mother’s back) and shortly after summited Mt. Baldy. They all camped in the Baja desert for 10 days when Emma was 11 months old. She hiked part of the coastal trail in Cornwall, England in 2019. This past

summer she and Gemmie camped at Writing-On-Stone park for three and a half weeks and named fish in the Milk River (like “avocado fish”) from a canoe, then stayed at Grandma’s place in Victoria, a 10 minute walk to wonders of the beach, for five weeks. The pandemic constrained Gemmie’s employment and while home in Canmore she spends an hour every day with Emma in the nearby forest; they forage for berries and imagine that a patch of tall grass is the Arctic tundra.

Overseeing a child in the wilderness isn’t easy; Gemmie and David had to learn techniques and tricks, like how to successfully change a baby’s diaper in the snow when it’s below freezing. If Emma is getting antsy Gemmie incorporates fantasy....M&Ms become colored snails hidden behind rocks. On a long canoe trip, David puts Emma in the bow and equips her with a toy sailboat and then her imagination takes over. They don’t push hard, but allow Emma to get acquainted with wilderness as a place and as a concept at her own pace. They have the generally optimistic view that if children are warm and fed, you can pretty much take them anywhere. Emma has been pulled in a pulk behind skis at -25 C, skis the green



Emma and her mother descending on the Stanley Glacier trail PHOTO: © G. OSBORN

runs at Norquay herself, goes through the motion of paddling a canoe even though she doesn't have the strength yet to actually paddle, and has learned how to calmly eat lunch surrounded by a hive's worth of buzzing wasps....she sets out the mushiest blueberry in her lunch for them.

Emma will grow up to be like Gemmie and David, strong and resilient and able to take care of herself, both in and out of the wilderness. In the meantime she has childhood to attend to. She treasures her unicorn sleeping bag and rainbow lantern; she thinks some crabs are mean, she

doesn't really like spiders but loves their webs; and her three favorite kinds of living things are animals, plants, and fairies. Though she says she hasn't actually seen the fairies....they might even be invisible.... she knows where the door is. 🍄



PHOTO: © G. OSBORN

Visiting an Old Friend

Signs of Change

By Taggart Wilson



I sit with my back against a chesterfield-sized boulder that had long ago tumbled from the ridges above, one of the dozens that now dot the rocky flats among the interlacing streams feeding Kinney Lake. Sitting across from me, my sister and brother-in-law share their regret for deciding on a day hike rather than joining in on a longer, overnight experience. It is a clear blue day, and for



Falls of the Pool PHOTO: © T. WILSON

the end of May the Berg Lake Trail in BC's Mount Robson Provincial Park is remarkably vacant. It offers us a sense of solitude in the typically bustling locale. After finishing lunch, we reshoulder our packs, say our farewells, and I continue alone over the remainder of the gravel flats and up the switchbacks that are the last grind before reaching Whitehorn campground.

During that steep, sweaty climb, I reflect on how I have neglected my passion for backcountry hiking in recent years. Through my thirties I was an on-call railroader and convinced myself that I had neither the time nor the energy for these experiences, an attitude that persisted into my forties when I left the railroad for a life in farming. As a youth growing up in Jasper National Park, my friends and I regularly took advantage of the opportunities to explore the pristine wilderness surrounding us. Late summer trips over Jonas Pass, biking to Snake Indian Falls, and snowshoeing into the ACC hut in the Fryatt Valley form some of my fondest memories. Having worked for Parks Canada in my late teens and early twenties, we were even afforded the occasional privilege of spending nights in unoccupied warden patrol cabins spread along Jasper's trail networks, a luxury that would free up enough space in our backpacks for a few coveted backcountry beverages.

Those adventures were about more than beautiful vistas and reconnecting with nature; they were about distancing my mind from the monotony of daily life and putting bothersome trivialities into proper per-

spective. They were a method of resetting. It was also a time long before I owned a smartphone and before the ubiquity of the internet. After climbing the last switchback and waddling across the thin, bouncy cable bridge to Whitehorn campground, I begin to realize that adventuring into the backcountry may also be an effective remedy for the more negative aspects of being continually connected.

My reentry into the world of backcountry hiking was spontaneous, having literally decided to go the day before I left. I could afford the spontaneity where I live – the Berg Lake Trail begins less than thirty minutes from the front door of my farmstead home in the Robson Valley and seemed the natural choice to reintroduce myself to a neglected passion. On the last Sunday of May, with the previous afternoon's hasty preparations crammed into an unnecessarily heavy backpack (I'm looking at you, can of clam chowder that returned home, uneaten), I jumped in the car and sped down Highway 16 towards the trailhead. I was surprised at how few vehicles occupied the parking area. Years ago, on previous forays into Berg Lake, I enjoyed meeting and sharing stories with people from around the world. But this occasion, undoubtedly shaped by pandemic-related travel restrictions, promised to be a much more solitary experience.

I was glad, therefore, to have the company of my sister and brother-in-law for the first section of trail to Kinney Lake. We set out, crossing the wide and sturdy bridge that spans the Robson River. The smooth, well-trodden path climbed steadily before



Emperor Falls PHOTO: © T. WILSON

us, already clear of snow and deadfall, often widening enough for us to walk, talk, and laugh alongside one another. The air was rich with the river's humidity and the smells of springtime blooming. After a few kilometers we were swallowed under the canopy of old-growth cedars, towering sentinels rising amidst the broadening leaves of Devil's club. The giant trees inspired conversation of a photo that had gone viral just a few days earlier. You've likely seen it – a massive, old-growth spruce tree with a diameter equal to the height of the semi-trailer hauling it on Vancouver Island for "processing." I imagined this place being stripped of its centuries-old denizens,

and I considered other ancient forests, not afforded the protection of Mount Robson provincial park, that have already passed from the world. Further on, despite our relaxed pace, we were soon spat out onto the shores of the brilliantly azure Kinney Lake. My brother-in-law generously relieved me of my clam chowder-laden backpack while skirting the water's edge, past the campground and cook shelter, until we reached the gravel flats of the far side where we stopped for lunch before parting ways.

Everyone knows the axiom that *it's about the journey, not the destination*. While generally true, I must push back ever so slightly after reaching Whitehorn campground.

Pressed against the east bank of the Robson River, the site is tightly nestled in a narrow gorge filled with the distant roar of countless waterfalls. They spill over the length of the imposing ridges above, resembling two plunge baths where the gods neglected to turn off the taps. I set up camp, then spend hours lost in a book lounging on a conspicuously L-shaped log next to the river. My eyes intermittently leave the pages to observe sunlight slowly climbing up and over the rockface above the campsite. I feel myself disconnect from everything left behind; the responsibilities of home and work, the 24-hour news cycle, whatever makes my phone vibrate. I realize this disconnect is prompting a depth of introspection not experienced in the days of my youth exploring Jasper National Park. I appreciate the absence of all the mediums that regularly compete for my attention at home, the respite from the digital world. After a luxurious backcountry meal of pre-cooked carrots and chicken breast over garlic noodles, dusk pushes my book and I into the tent where the euphonious valley quickly lulls me to slumber.

I begin the steep ascent to Emperor Falls in the pallid light of morning, pausing at the White Falls and Falls of the Pool viewpoints, punctuation marks along the treed switchbacks. Water thunders down the precipitous drops at each location and glittering mist billows from the falls when the sun climbs over the ridge above into the white sky. Further up, my feet occasionally punch through the crust of snow still covering shady sections of the path. I am caught off guard by a clucking spruce grouse that twitches into motion on the trail ahead. I instinctively recoil, and its brilliantly red-browed eyes track my movements as I shuffle past. I take a last break from the climb to follow the diversion from the main path leading to the Emperor Falls lookout. The clearing there is moistened by spray at the edge of a roaring waterfall that plunges into an enormous fissure in the rock.

I push up the final stretch of the ascent to be rewarded with the open views of the sparsely vegetated alpine gravel flats under

the vigil of iconic Mount Robson. While negotiating the snow-patched scree slides sloping into the ancient glacier bed, my eyes drift from the Robson River and its meandering offshoots below to the foreboding north face of the behemoth above. I follow the trail as it descends from the scree slopes and disappears into the rocky surface of the valley floor. Finally, Berg Lake emerges into view, still covered in fractured ice like a shattered windowpane still holding its form. A defined trail appears again alongside the lake leading to the campground and the spacious Hargreaves shelter.

It is not my first time here, but it is the only time being here completely alone save for a chubby, habituated chipmunk who inches ever closer hoping to share in my

crackers and cheese. I giggle as a male harlequin duck, pronounced white bars across his red and charcoal body, lands and slides clumsily off one of the fragments of ice while his female mate, brushed with muted brown tones, glides gracefully to rest on open water beside him. Across the lake, pale blue Berg Glacier sporadically moans and cracks in its imperceptible crawl down the shoulder of Mount Robson. A persistent breeze hushes the valley. The absence of other humans makes the distance between here and the trailhead feel like a widening gulf between self and society. It elicits a peculiar emotional mixture of contentedness and lonesomeness, the satisfaction of solitary introspection set against a longing to share the experience. I miss my partner and

perhaps I needed the opportunity to miss her. Immersed in the tranquil surroundings, I realize that, as my life has accumulated more responsibilities and competing distractions, these escapes matter more to me now than in the carefree days of my youth. Returning home, I waste no time in booking an early-September trek with my partner over Jasper's South Boundary Trail. I eagerly anticipate our return to disconnect in the serenity of undisturbed wild places, the effort and the reward, a renewed perspective on what we have lost already and what is not yet lost.▲

Taggart farms in the Robson Valley where he continues his recovery from taking a political science course AWA's Executive Director offered many years ago.

Featured Artist Albertine Crow Shoe



PHOTO: © A. CROW SHOE



Silver parfleche on tripod (a parfleche is a bag made of rawhide, traditionally on the Alberta plains a dried buffalo hide). PHOTO: © A. CROW SHOE

Vicary Ridge Hike Questions Alberta's Regulation of Coal Exploration

By Chris Saunders, AWA Director



Hikers are familiar with the concept of an undiscovered gem, a lovely hike away from the popular areas and absent from most of the guidebooks. On most counts the hike up Vicary Ridge from the south meets that description comfortably. It is in the Crowsnest Pass; the trailhead is just off Highway 40 about 14 kilometres north of Highway 3 at Coleman.

On June 26, 2021, under the banner of AWA's Adventures for Wilderness program, a small group of AWA members embarked on a hike with two purposes. The first was to reveal an undiscovered gem in the Crowsnest Pass to hikers from Calgary. The second was to witness the extent of Montem Resources' coal exploration activities on the ridge and the magnitude of further exploration planned by Montem in the immediate area.

Vicary Ridge is at the heart of Montem's Chinook project. This is the project Montem advertises as intending to develop if it receives regulatory permission to proceed with its Tent Mountain Redevelopment Project. The Chinook property sprawls over approximately 9,742 hectares (97.42 square kilometres). As Figure 1 illustrates, Chinook would destroy westslope cutthroat trout critical habitat (the same is true for bull trout critical habitat). It also would occupy core grizzly bear habitat and likely pose an obstacle to the movements of the Alberta/B.C./Montana regional grizzly bear population.

As is often the case in the Crowsnest Pass area, the route up Vicary Ridge starts by following meandering abandoned logging

roads but soon turns upslope in a northerly direction. As altitude is gained the tree cover thins and stunning views to the south, west and east appear. The south west aspect is dominated by the familiar sight of Crowsnest Mountain and the Seven Sisters and to the east is Livingstone Ridge, a mostly knife-edge ridge a full 30 kilometres long.

As we moved higher into the subalpine, Clark's nutcrackers greeted us noisily. The nutcracker and whitebark pine are co-dependent. The cones of whitebark pine, an endangered species under the federal *Species-at-Risk Act*, cannot open on their own. Seed dispersal and regeneration largely depend on grizzly bears and Clark's nutcrackers. The nutcracker opens the cones and stashes them in the high country. Those caches, in turn, may produce the next generation of pine. Whitebark pine seeds are a high energy food rich in fats, carbohydrates, and protein. This makes them highly sought after by grizzlies that are fattening up before denning. This is likely why it appears that grizzlies will select for whitebark pine habitat if it's in their range.

The last third of the ascent is largely through flower meadows which, in the last week of June, were in full bloom. This writer hadn't seen a more extensive display of bright blue alpine forget-me-nots in 40 years of hiking Alberta's Eastern Slopes.

The summit ridge provides spectacular views in all directions. The surface of this ridge is covered with ancient embedded rocks known as "patterned ground." Continual freezing and thawing during a

colder, wetter era forced these rocks out of the underlying softer rocks below to the surface in a consistently repeated pattern, with longitudinal grass-covered low hummocks between them. Although not unique, the patterned ground on Vicary Ridge is an impressive sight. At the summit, it's in a pristine state.

It was the post-lunch walk along the ridge to the north that brought us to the damage left behind by Montem's exploration activities. This included the building of a steeply "switch-backed" road designed to take vehicles from the valley to the west, up to the top of the north end of the summit ridge, and three drilling pads with protruding pipes covering the drill holes. This construction work has destroyed the patterned ground at the north end of the ridge.

The exploration work on Vicary Ridge may have been completed in the early winter of 2020. At Montem's April 30, 2021 annual general meeting, the company said it had completed its exploration drilling for Chinook. But, to date, there has clearly been no attempt to restore or remediate the site. During 2020, as part of its community outreach efforts, Montem met with representatives of the many recreational users of the areas in which it was proposing to carry out its exploration. During that meeting the Montem representative promised to restore the damage caused by the exploration. This declaration certainly sounds important and responsible, but whether it will happen is another matter. Montem arguably is in a very precarious financial situation. This

is reflected in the fact that today, a dollar will buy you about twenty Montem shares on the Australian Securities Exchange. Indeed, it is only when one is able to see the extent of the damage that it is clear that restoration, that is returning the area to its natural state, will likely be impossible.

The panoramic view from the top of Vicary Ridge clearly shows the extent of the damage from the recent round of coal exploration in the region. To the east one can see numerous new roads and drilling pads on the ridges west of Livingstone Ridge, and on the slopes of Ma Butte, to the south. In fact, Montem has a barrier across a road in the valley to the south of Vicary Ridge with signs indicating exploration is ongoing in that valley and the peak on the south side. These signs even state “No Trespassing,” despite the fact that this is public land.

Our contact with the damage to Vicary

Ridge caused by Montem’s exploration activities is just one of numerous similar instances of significant damage to the landscape in the area. While walking back through this damage one is left to reflect that the whole coal exploration exercise has been grossly mismanaged by the Alberta Government. It appears that three small companies, with very limited financial resources, Montem Resources Limited, Atrum Coal Limited and Cabin Ridge Project Limited, may have been encouraged by the Government to undertake coal exploration in various parts of Alberta’s Eastern Slopes. This was done largely in secret without any consultation with the people affected and before any public discussion of the environmental and economic impacts. It appears that a regulatory constraint, such as bonding to cover the cost of restoration of landscape damage, was not imposed on the companies. Further, as a result of the environmental impact as-

sessments now required by the federal government, and other challenges facing these companies, it is certainly plausible that the exploration activities will not lead to the development of coal mines.

We now have a situation where the damage to the landscape from the exploration programs of Montem, Atrum Coal, and Cabin Ridge is clear, and in some cases, still continuing. Huge question marks punctuate the need for restoration and remediation. Meanwhile the Alberta Government, finally, has just started the process of consulting with Albertans on whether they think coal mining in the Eastern Slopes should occur at all. Indeed, there are strong indications that many Albertans will tell the Government’s consultation committee that they do not want any coal mining in the Eastern Slopes.

Further, on June 17, 2021 the Alberta Energy Regulator, through the Grassy Mountain Joint Review Panel, ruled that



The aftermath of coal exploration on Vicary Ridge and Ma Butte
PHOTO: © A. DES MOULINS

With its Chinook-Vicary project, Montem Resources hopes to replace most of this view with open-pit coal mining. How is this Category 4 terrain ecologically distinct from Category 2 terrain that received de facto protection from coal mining? PHOTO: © C. SAUNDERS

the Grassy Mountain coal mine proposed for the Crowsnest Pass area was not in the public interest. The Panel concluded that the expected negative environmental impacts to surface water quality and westslope cutthroat trout and their habitat outweighed the projected economic benefits. Grassy Mountain's fate clearly is relevant to the ambitions of companies like Montem and Atrium. Many of the environmental issues and the modest economic benefits from coal mining that stopped the Grassy Mountain project in its tracks will be raised again in any projects in the area which might arise from the current exploration efforts.

Now we are left with the mess created by unregulated, and for many Albertans, unwanted, coal exploration. There needs to be accountability for the Government's disastrous approach to coal mining. The resignations of the chief proponents of this strategy, the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Environment and Parks, would seem to be entirely appropriate and necessary. 🐾

Emily Pauline Johnson
“At Crow’s Nest Pass”

*At Crow’s Nest Pass the mountains rend
 Themselves apart, the rivers wend
 A lawless course about their feet,
 And breaking into torrents beat
 In useless fury where they blend
 At Crow’s Nest Pass.*

*The nesting eagle, wise, discreet,
 Wings up the gorge’s lone retreat
 And makes some barren crag her friend
 At Crow’s Nest Pass.*

*Uncertain clouds, half-high, suspend
 Their shifting vapours, and contend
 With rocks that suffer not defeat;
 And snows, and suns, and mad winds meet
 To battle where the cliffs defend
 At Crow’s Nest Pass.*

Featured Artist
 Albertine Crow Shoe



Parfleche bag PHOTO: © A. CROW SHOE

An Ode to Fish Creek

By Phillip Meintzer, *AWA Conservation Specialist*



Major cities aren't typically associated with escapes into nature, getting lost in the forest, or bumping into snakes while cooling off in secluded streams. Usually cities conjure up images of skyscrapers, sprawling subdivisions, the sound of honking horns, and mile after mile of concrete. However, growing up as a young child in Calgary with a relatively relaxed mom, right on the edge of Fish Creek Provincial Park, provided me with the incredible opportunity to have a childhood shaped by wilderness, without venturing too far from our doorstep.

I was raised in the community of Woodlands, in southwest Calgary, right along the northwest edge of Fish Creek – just above the area known as Bebo Grove for those who are familiar with the park. My mom and stepdad still live there in my childhood home. I visit frequently, not only for the sake of family and the dogs, but because I still adore Fish Creek to this day – it's nearby, it's accessible (by car, bike, foot etc.), it's free, and it provides a space to escape from the everyday confines of inner-city life despite existing within the city itself. Fish Creek might not be the biggest or most charismatic of Alber-

ta's provincial parks, but it's managed to have had a profound impact on my life since I was very young.

Looking back on it now, having everyday access to Fish Creek as an adolescent was an incredible blessing, especially when my parents separated and my mom had to look after me and my brother by herself. We both learned how to ride bikes at an early age, which opened up the vastness of Fish Creek to our curiosity and sense of adventure. This meant we could spend hours or entire days unsupervised in the wilderness of our backyard. Fish Creek gave me freedom



Fall in Fish Creek Provincial Park
CREDIT: BERNARD SPRAGG VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

and independence. It helped me gain a sense of direction; it allowed me to get lost on an unknown trail and forced me to find my way home. It provided me with an education in being outdoors, reducing my fear of the unknown, and it introduced me to the idea that we share our environment with wildlife – this world isn't only for us humans. Being bitten by a garter snake while attempting my best Steve Irwin impression was a quick way for me to learn the importance of respecting wildlife – no reading or lectures required.

For me, returning to Fish Creek as an adult usually takes the form of running, where I get to explore the same trails as I did during my childhood, with the added benefit of a greater understanding of ecology and the interconnectedness of living things. I almost certainly know the park layout better than the back of my own hand by this point – but who really knows their hand that well anyways? Most times when I run in the city, on pavement, or on treadmills, I will listen to

music or podcasts on headphones to drown out the ambient noise and distractions. But, this isn't my routine in the park. Nature's music is what my senses crave there. The sound of birds in the trees, the constant drone of bugs in the summertime, the peaceful silence of mid-winter, and the trickle of water flowing over rocks as it travels down the creek creates a wilderness symphony that I never tire of. Running to this soundtrack provides me with the ultimate contemplative space to re-center my focus and stabilize my mood no matter my headspace at the start of my run. Wilderness is integral to my wellbeing.

A close friend of mine recently asked me about my own conception of identity. Do I consider myself to be more Calgarian, Albertan, or Canadian? I struggle with this question because I don't feel like I identify with any one of those options more than the others despite having arguments for all three. Since I feel more at home in my small corner of Fish Creek than I have in many other plac-

es, maybe that should be my answer instead.

I recognize that it's not always possible for cities to incorporate wilderness spaces into urban planning decisions – even if I think that they should. But, at the same time, I cannot over-emphasize how important it is that all people, children especially, have opportunities to immerse themselves in truly wild spaces and learn about the natural world for themselves. Understanding the natural world is a crucial first step to caring for it, and an immersion into wilderness is a first-hand shortcut to that kind of understanding. Maybe more people would be empathetic towards our non-human neighbours if they had the kinds of experiences I did as a child. Fish Creek taught me not to fear the unknown in nature, but instead to appreciate that the unknown is still allowed to persist. How boring would our world be if we knew what was behind every tree and under every stone? 🌲

Amy Lowell
“Summer”

*Some men there are who find in nature all
Their inspiration, hers the sympathy
Which spurs them on to any great endeavor,
To them the fields and woods are closest friends,
And they hold dear communion with the hills;
The voice of waters soothes them with its fall,
And the great winds bring healing in their sound.
To them a city is a prison house
Where pent up human forces labour and strive,
Where beauty dwells not, driven forth by man;
But where in winter they must live until
Summer gives back the spaces of the hills.
To me it is not so. I love the earth
And all the gifts of her so lavish hand:
Sunshine and flowers, rivers and rushing winds,
Thick branches swaying in a winter storm,
And moonlight playing in a boat's wide wake;
But more than these, and much, ah, how much more,
I love the very human heart of man.*

*Above me spreads the hot, blue mid-day sky,
Far down the hillside lies the sleeping lake
Lazily reflecting back the sun,
And scarcely ruffled by the little breeze
Which wanders idly through the nodding ferns.
The blue crest of the distant mountain, tops
The green crest of the hill on which I sit;
And it is summer, glorious, deep-toned summer,
The very crown of nature's changing year
When all her surging life is at its full.
To me alone it is a time of pause,
A void and silent space between two worlds,
When inspiration lags, and feeling sleeps,
Gathering strength for efforts yet to come.
For life alone is creator of life,
And closest contact with the human world
Is like a lantern shining in the night
To light me to a knowledge of myself.
I love the vivid life of winter months
In constant intercourse with human minds,
When every new experience is gain
And on all sides we feel the great world's heart;
The pulse and throb of life which makes us men!*

Where Solar Energy is a Conservation Loss:

EPCOR's Edmonton Solar Farm

By Ian Urquhart, *Executive Director*



Electrifying – this is not the feeling EPCOR's solar farm generates in the Edmonton conservation community. Unwelcome and unwise better capture, if perhaps too politely, the reaction of many to this project now under construction in southwest Edmonton.

Last October Edmonton City Council voted 7 to 6 to rezone part of Edmonton's river valley to allow EPCOR, the City-owned utility, to build a solar farm on 99 acres adjacent to the company's E. L. Smith water treatment plant on the North Saskatchewan River. EPCOR will install up to 45,000 solar panels at this facility and the farm will have a peak generation capacity of roughly 12 megawatts. The project's renewable power will reduce EPCOR's greenhouse gas emissions from the water treatment plant. Electricity that isn't used in the water treatment plant will be sold on the electricity market.

This project was discussed and debated on numerous occasions since early 2018 before City Council and in Council Committees. Edmonton conservation organizations were perennial, well-informed, participants in Council Committee meetings and in public hearings. That some conservationists strongly opposed EPCOR's project – ostensibly a “green” policy initiative – may surprise some readers. These conservationists didn't oppose the project because they are opposed to renewable energy. To the contrary, they made it very clear to Councilors they were strong supporters of shifting electricity production away from fossil fuels. But, to them, the wisdom of solar or wind power depends important-

ly on developing those resources in ways that don't sacrifice other core conservation values and principles. In their considered opinion, EPCOR's decision to put its solar farm in Edmonton's River Valley needlessly sacrifices those values and principles. It represents a conservation loss, not a gain.

Background

A holistic vision of conservation for Edmonton's River Valley was established more than a century ago. In 1915 Frederick C. Todd, a landscape architect, advised the provincial government to protect the North Saskatchewan river valley in Edmonton. He recommended protection in order “to provide Edmontonians with a contiguous recreation and open space system.” These protected lands totaled 7,425 hectares and a great deal of this land was designated for recreational use.

Arriving in Alberta in 1987, I never understood the debate between some Calgarians and Edmontonians over whose city is better. I still don't. I do know this – any Edmontonian in such a debate who doesn't boast about the river valley as a treasure is ignoring the city's most outstanding natural feature. It is a gem.

The original North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan Bylaw, passed in 1985, was right then to call the river valley “a true Alberta heritage.” What drove the plan was a vision that intended “the major portion of the River Valley and Ravine System for use as an environmental protection area and for major urban and natural parks.” That vision was rooted in “the fundamental philosophy that a contin-

uous open space system, interspersed with recreational activity nodes, can meet the diverse demands for recreation in an urban setting and yet protect the river valley environment.” As for development, it anticipated that some consistent with a River Valley system of formal/informal parks and natural areas would be considered. Major public utilities weren't to be found on that list.

The 1985 plan also anticipated that City of Edmonton ambitions represented one of the greatest threats to this vision. “The municipal level of government has probably exerted the greatest development pressure on the River Valley with public utility proposals and transportation plans,” it stated. “These uses tend to be incompatible with the aims of nature preservation and parkland development.” EPCOR is the Edmonton-based utility providing water, drainage, and power services to the community; the City is EPCOR's only shareholder.

The City showed its commitment to conservation in other ways in the lead up to the debate about the solar farm. Notable here is the City's 2011 environmental strategic plan, *The Way We Green*. EPCOR would argue during the solar farm debate that its plans respected the ambitions expressed therein. Opponents believe that EPCOR cherry-picked, chose very selectively, from what the strategic plan called for.

Another key piece of background information is the growing interest in addressing climate change and developing renewable energy. Premier Notley's 2015 Climate Leadership Plan mandated that renewable power would constitute 30 percent of Alberta's electricity generating capacity in



Location of E. L. Smith Solar Farm



Overview of the Solar Farm Location.

2030. In 2015 the renewable share of generating capacity in Alberta was 17 percent and renewables generated 10 percent of the province's electricity.

In 2015, the City released its Community Energy Transition Strategy. As we've come to expect from most governments at all levels, the Strategy set ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reductions goals. It called for Edmonton's 2035 emissions to be 35 percent below 2005 levels (in 2019 Edmonton's emissions were only 5.6 percent below 2005 levels – the City has a long way to go).

Greening electrical consumption in the community is one path towards realizing this target. EPCOR endorsed this goal and, in its 2017 rate application to the City, proposed a "Green Power Initiative." EPCOR proposed to convert about 10 percent of its power consumption to locally produced renewable supplies. In 2016, City Council approved the \$1.9 million annual special rate increase EPCOR wanted its customers to pay in order to pursue this goal. EPCOR either would develop that capacity itself or it would purchase green power in the electricity market.

These factors largely established the context for considering renewable energy development options in the City of Edmonton. On the one hand, the landscape dimension of conservation is embodied in the person of the River Valley. On the other hand, climate change and the need

to green the City's electricity production became more important to policy makers. The trick then became to further the second objective without harming or crippling the former.

EPCOR's Case For A Solar Farm in the River Valley

In making the case for the solar farm, EPCOR aligned its preferred option with *The Way We Green*, City Council's 2011 environmental strategic plan. One of the plan's objectives was to see that: "(a) significant and increasing proportion of Edmonton's energy comes from renewable sources, **with as much as reasonably possible produced locally.**" (my emphasis)

Arguably EPCOR's decisions to apply for a green power rate increase and to champion a solar farm in the river valley were made at virtually the same time. In 2016 EPCOR said it was assessing the feasibility of a solar power plant. In 2017 EPCOR said it would not purchase local green power. Instead, it had "initiated a new project to construct a solar farm on land adjacent to the E.L Smith Water Treatment Plant...."

When EPCOR appeared before the City's Utility Committee in February 2018, it presented the solar farm as the most cost-effective alternative for electricity ratepayers. After that presentation the City requested more research from EPCOR. It asked EPCOR for a so-called "triple bottom line"

analysis where EPCOR would evaluate the economic/financial, social, and environmental impacts of the project.

Financially, the analysis prepared for EPCOR by HDR Corporation showed that, if local generation wasn't required, an offsite wind farm – not the solar farm – was the best financial option. An offsite wind farm's levelized cost of all energy was 18 percent lower than the projections for the E.L. Smith solar farm. The levelized cost of a wind farm's renewable energy was projected to be dramatically lower – 78 percent – than the cost of the solar farm's renewable energy. The solar farm only won the financial bragging rights if a key condition was added to the equation – the renewable energy had to be generated in the immediate vicinity of Edmonton.

According to the environmental criteria used in HDR's analysis, the offsite wind farm option was equal to or superior to EPCOR's solar farm option, with one exception. That exception was avian mortality – an operating wind farm would kill more birds than the solar farm would.

The only social criterion where EPCOR's option clearly would deliver more benefits than the offsite wind farm was the local economic impact associated with the construction and operation of the solar farm. HDR also tried to argue that the offsite wind farm was "not aligned" with the City's objectives when it came to increasing re-



This copse of trees, where a wildlife camera show deer congregated, was cut down in June 2021 for the solar farm. PHOTO: © E. GORMLEY

newable energy production in the city. On the other hand, the solar farm was aligned with these objectives.

But in reaching this conclusion HDR ignored key provisions of *The Way We Green*. Objective 3.7 of that plan states the City will treat the River Valley and Ravine System “as Edmonton’s greatest natural asset.” This called on the City to protect, preserve, and enhance this system. It’s very difficult to see how the solar farm aligns with this City “objective” and its associated strategic actions.

Arguably one of the most important social criteria considered in the HDR analysis was precedence – what would a 99-acre solar farm mean for future development in the river valley? The offsite wind farm was the clear winner here. It obviously didn’t pose any development threat to the future of the river valley. HDR attempted to portray the solar farm as only creating development pressures and precedents that already were permitted under the River Valley Bylaw and Edmonton’s draft *Ribbon of Green* report. More will be said about this in the next section.

Another important social criterion, the project’s impact on the traditional lands and cultural history of First Nations, wasn’t addressed at all in this triple bottom line analysis. City Council would instruct EPCOR to address this gap, to better consider

the impact of the project on the Enoch Cree First Nation, before a final vote on the project would be held.

Selling the Solar Farm to Edmonton City Council

Members of the Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition don’t have many kind words when it comes to their account of how EPCOR successfully sold its solar farm to City Council. They don’t believe that EPCOR, its consultants, and the City administration always communicated accurate information as they built the case to impose a project – a major utility development – that seemed so contrary to the intent of the River Valley Bylaw. The picture the Coalition paints is one where pro-solar farm interests shaped and informed the decision-making process to secure their preferred outcome.

When I spoke with coalition members, they drew several circumstances to my attention that lend credence to their view. Perhaps the changing opinion of the City’s Energy Transition Advisory Committee about the project bears this suspicion out most powerfully. To Raquel Feroe, this Committee was “very savvy,” “a very great professional group.” The Coalition was surprised then when, in a January 2019 mem-

orandum to City Council, the Committee welcomed the solar farm for its positive contribution to the City’s climate change/greenhouse gas emissions/energy resiliency goals. The Committee’s memorandum acknowledged that “land-use trade offs” may arise when investing in renewable energy projects and that the project site wasn’t “ideally located.” But, it put aside those reservations and noted that the solar farm would be located on “already disturbed and industrially zoned land.”

The second point here – that the land was already zoned for industrial use – was flat out wrong. The Coalition brought this to the Committee’s attention; the land was zoned “Metropolitan Recreation Zone,” not industrial. At the very least, this mistake was created by miscommunication between EPCOR and the Committee, a miscommunication that doesn’t appear to have been corrected by EPCOR’s member on this Advisory Committee. The Energy Transition Committee withdrew its support for the solar farm after it realized the land would have to be rezoned. The land-use trade off table was turned.

The Committee was correct to note that the land EPCOR coveted for its solar farm was “already disturbed”...by a farmer’s plow. Harry Stelfox, a retired provincial

wildlife biologist, noted that, since farming the land had stopped many years ago, the land was returning to its wilder former self. More or less continuous vegetative growth, of both native and non-native forbs and grasses, was found throughout the site. Native shrubs and trees were starting to repopulate the area to a more limited extent. As Stelfox would tell City Council in October 2020, these “already disturbed” lands constituted important wildlife habitat in the river valley and a corridor for wildlife movement. His presentation told Council “the area was well-suited for accelerated naturalization with the aid of some well-planned and executed naturalization plantings.” Fencing the solar farm and the water treatment plant will create a barrier to wildlife on just one side of the complex that will be 1.4 kilometres long.

HDR also incorporated some questionable analysis and interpretation into its endorsement of the solar farm option. When it addressed the precedent for development a solar farm would create it argued that the City’s draft Ribbon of Green report regarded favourably a host of industrial possibilities on the E.L. Smith Water Treatment Plant lands. Again, this simply wasn’t accurate. Those lands were designated as an Active/Working Landscape only to provide water treatment services. “If the site is no longer required for that use,” the 2020 version of *Ribbon of Green* stated, “the classification is to be re-evaluated.”

HDR was wrong again to conclude that, because an offsite wind farm by definition wouldn’t generate electricity locally, it was necessarily “not aligned” with the City’s interest in increasing the community’s use of renewable energy. Increasing renewable energy use was the first part of the City’s commitment to renewable energy in *The Way We Green*. But, unlike increasing renewable energy use, local generation wasn’t an absolute requirement. It should be pursued if it was “reasonably possible.” Arguably, the expectations of the River Valley Bylaw made solar energy production at the E. L. Smith site “unreasonably possible.”

Selling the project to City Council also

was easier if the provincial wildlife directive for solar projects was deemed inapplicable to EPCOR’s ambition. The language in the directive is very clear. “Generally,” the directive reads, “solar energy project should not be sited in...valleys of large permanent watercourses...” Alberta Environment and Parks apparently told the Conservation Coalition that, on a risk level of 0 to 5 – with 5 constituting the greatest environmental risk, the solar farm merited a “5.” Furthermore, the City’s own ecological assessments of the project weren’t making it into the inboxes of Councilors. The Coalition FOIPed the City for those reports. In the City’s first response to that FOIP request the entire document was redacted; only the cover letter was provided to the Coalition. When the Coalition ultimately received the assessment they asked for, they discovered that the City’s environmental planner did not favour the project. The planner gave the solar farm a negative score on 14 of the 16 criteria employed in the assessment.

Earlier I mentioned that City Council would instruct EPCOR to consult further with the Enoch Cree First Nation. In 2019, the withdrawal of Enoch support for the

project was crucial to Council’s failure to approve the solar farm then. The Coalition’s Kristine Kowalchuk believes that in 2019, despite the excellent ecological case the Coalition put forward, the project would have gone ahead if the Enoch Cree had not withdrawn their support for the project. That withdrawal occurred, in part, because of the archaeological reports about the site Eric Gormley, another Coalition member, shared excerpts from the reports with the Enoch Cree and members of other First Nations. Some of the artifacts detailed in the reports were 9,000 years old, 1,000 years older than any other artifacts uncovered in the Edmonton region. The site appeared to have been used for the annual Sun Dance cultural ceremony and gathering – a very significant cultural event in the lives of Plains indigenous peoples. Kowalchuk described the significance of the archaeological reports in these words: “I got the sense that the archeologist who was writing them could almost not even control his excitement over what was being found.”

EPCOR did what Council requested and consulted the Enoch Cree. When the solar farm issue came back to Council in 2020, it



Walking path in mature forest immediately adjacent to EPCOR’s solar farm PHOTO: © H. STELFOX

did so with Enoch support – sort of. EPCOR and the Enoch Cree signed a memorandum of understanding in September 2020. But Enoch Council never voted on the memorandum, a memorandum that was “not a binding legal agreement and does not create any binding obligations on any party.” And, two Enoch Councilors spoke against the solar farm proposal when it came back before Council in October 2020.

Rob Houle, a former City of Edmonton Indigenous Relations Consultant and Officer, found it hard to accept Council’s decision since there is no question that the farm will sit on “a bonafide Cree heritage site in Alberta.” For him it was “a sad day” when Council gave EPCOR permission to impose its solar farm. About the degradation of this culturally significant site Houle wrote “we will only be remembered as the people who destroyed much of it for power.”

City Council’s October 2020 permission of EPCOR’s application to rezone valley lands from recreational to industrial came by the narrowest of margins, seven in favour and six opposed. The mountain of information that EPCOR’s opponents had marshaled between 2017 and 2020 certainly painted a picture where EPCOR, its consultants, and City administrators had mischaracterized the project and its im-

pacts. But, that extensive work failed to secure the majority of votes needed to stop EPCOR from building its solar farm in the middle of Edmonton’s Ribbon of Green.

Where to Now?

This article was sparked by an email I received from Raquel Feroe in late June. She was devastated by what was happening on the lands adjacent to Edmonton’s water treatment plant. The rather pastoral scene Harry Stelfox had shown councilors last October was gone. In its place was heavy machinery of all types... digging, tearing, and moving the land. Utility construction and expansion, the threat the River Valley Bylaw tried to protect Edmontonians from, were taking over this section of the river valley.

The passion and critical insights the Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition brought to this issue is equaled by their determination. They are continuing the fight against the solar farm in the courts. They have filed for judicial review of Council’s October 2020 decision. The grounds for the case arise from a June 2019 Council motion. It effectively sent the proposal back to City administration. The first part of that motion required additional engagement activities with the Enoch Cree First Nation. The second part of the motion is the focus

of the judicial review application. It asked for the “(w)ork and reporting necessary to allow Council to fully consider whether the location within the River Valley should be deemed essential by Council.” The Coalition thinks that Council simply ignored the findings of the work and never did what the motion required – deeming that the project, in its river valley location, was essential.

On the face of it, the “essential” requirement may be a high hurdle for EPCOR’s lawyers to overcome. The hurdle was created in the 1985 River Valley Bylaw. With respect to the development of major facilities in the river valley that plan said: “It is the policy of this Plan that major public facilities shall not be constructed or expanded unless their location within the River Valley is deemed essential and approved by City Council.” This may be especially the case because, in researching this story, I couldn’t any requirement that Edmonton **must** increase its use of renewable energy from local sources.

The Coalition believes its court case will go ahead this November. I suspect the ghosts of our Cree and white settler ancestors who privileged a holistic conservation vision have their fingers crossed that the Coalition succeeds. For more information about the Coalition visit its website at: <https://www.ervcc.com> 🐾

Mary Electa Adams “Among the Foot-hills of the Rockies”

*Come, let us walk. 'Tis of the summer day--
The long, long summer day--the lingering afternoon,
And Nature here has phases all her own
I would not miss. Swift swings the river down
From yonder towering two-leaved mountain gates,
O'erhung with drapery of rose and pearl,
Past winding slopes, along the valley's length,
In deep concealment now, now flashing by,
Contemptuous of delay, flinging a kiss
In passing; lost at length in hazy light.
What hands have levelled all those terraces
That look upon his course? Now see aloft
Where swaths of shadow fall and slide*

*Among the gold upon the dimpled hills,
Cadenced in their vast and rhythmic sweep,
By hollows and by seams that once were filled
With rushing torrents. See! see how they lie
Fold upon fold, in cycles of the past,
Or wind or wave-swept into glorious shapes,
And piled against the azure of the heavens.
These undulating lines, like silenced waves
Taken in mid-course of their unrivalled leap,
To fix forever their unresting course,
Seem to my eyes, in the calm evenings, still
To palpitate away into the moving sky.*

Momentous:

The Moose Lake Land-Use Plan

By Carolyn Campbell, AWA Conservation Director

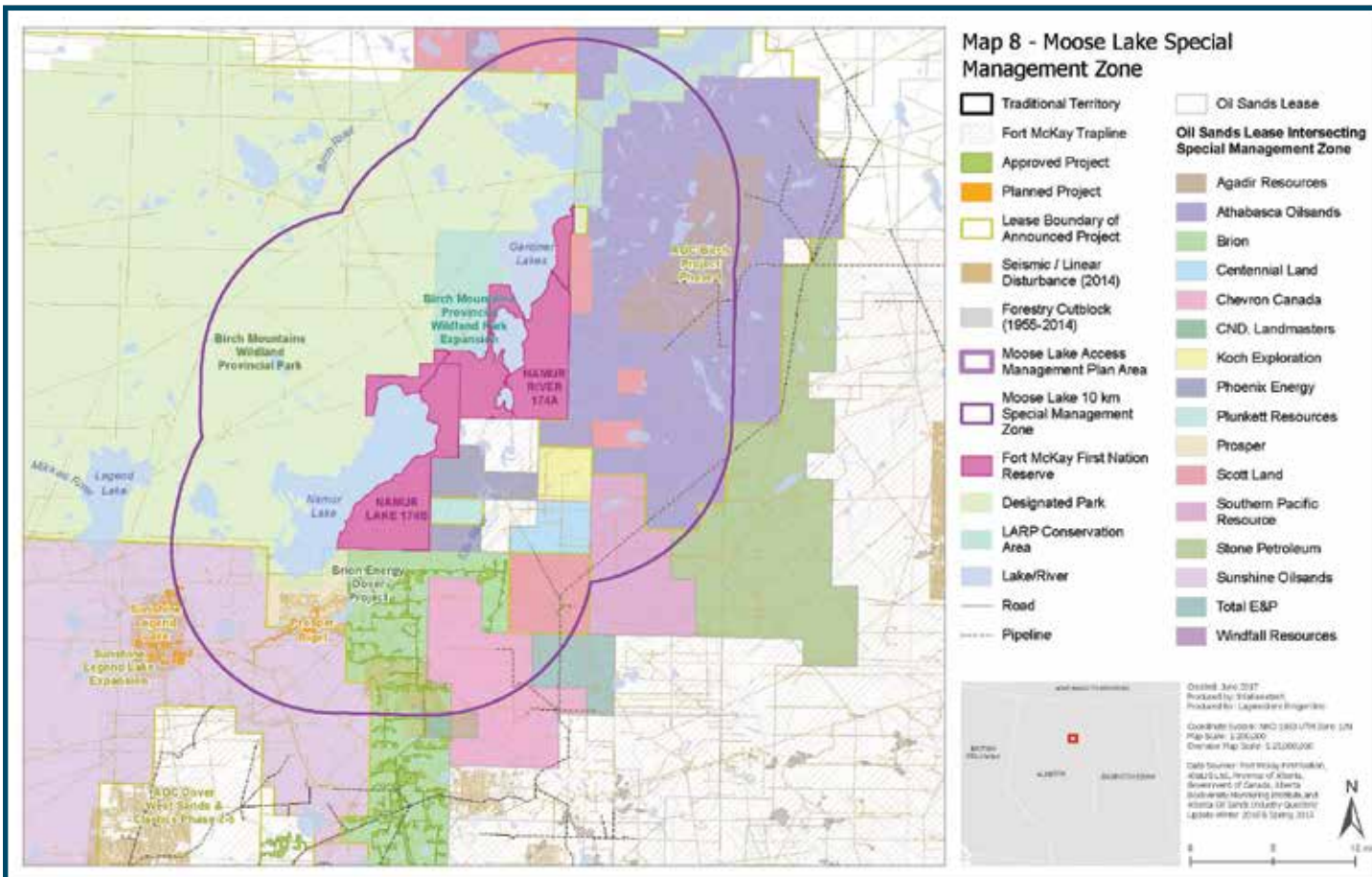


Thanks to Fort McKay First Nations' vision and tenacity, the Moose Lake Access Management Plan that was announced by the Alberta government on February 9, 2021 is a remarkable achievement. It is Alberta's first plan to set specific mandatory limits on cumulative industrial land disturbances to protect biodiversity. The Plan covers about 1,000 km² that's a small area in provincial terms, but mighty in its benefits to wildlife, ecosystems, and Treaty implementation.

It is crucial for its influence to spread far and wide. All Albertans concerned about Indigenous rights and reconciliation, wilderness conservation, and biodiversity management should become familiar with its innovative measures to limit cumulative industrial land-use impacts on Alberta provincial lands.

The Plan applies to a so-called ‘10 Kilometre Special Management Zone’ (10KMZ) located about 100 kilometres northwest of Fort McMurray, within the Lower Athabasca

ca region of northeast Alberta (see map). The 10KMZ extends for 10 kilometres in all directions around Fort McKay First Nation's Gardiner and Namur Lake reserves 174A and B, granted in 1915, which the Indigenous communities know as the Moose Lake reserves. About 40 percent of the Zone is in a protected area, Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park. Just over half the Zone is multi-use public lands and the remaining area, about eight percent, constitutes reserve lands.



The 10 Kilometre Zone that will be managed according to the landmark Moose Lake Access Management Plan; map also shows the extensive industrial impacts and leases near the Moose Lake Reserves. CREDIT: FORT MCKAY FIRST NATION.

Fort McKay First Nation spent nearly twenty years engaging with the Alberta government via discussions, formal regulatory hearings, and legal actions to achieve an access management plan for this area. When the plan was finalized in February, Fort McKay First Nation's statement emphasized that its Treaty rights had been recognized by Alberta's decision to protect the Moose Lake area. "This is a long-awaited moment in the process of honourable Treaty implementation," said Fort McKay First Nation Chief Mel Grandjamb. "We are grateful for our Elders and community leaders who were early champions for the protection of Moose Lake and advocates for the full implementation of Treaty rights, and meaningful acts of reconciliation."

The Nation's main present day reserve is the hamlet of Fort McKay. It was originally the site of a Hudson's Bay trading post on the Athabasca River, 65 kilometres north of Fort McMurray. The Fort McKay settlement is now surrounded on three sides by open pit tar sands mines, tailings ponds, and upgraders. Extensive industrial disturbances from energy exploration and 'in situ' oil sands development are also nearby. Moose Lake reserve lands northwest of the Fort McKay hamlet have remained vital for the people of Fort McKay First Nation and the neighbouring Fort McKay Métis to practice

traditional land uses essential to the preservation of their Cree and Dene cultures.

Breakthroughs in Managing Cumulative Industrial Impacts

The Moose Lake Access Management Plan identifies three intended outcomes:

- ecological integrity;
- exercise of Section 35 rights and traditional land uses; and
- well managed development of resources.

The Plan improves environmental management on many fronts. It sets proactive air quality measures and indicators to 'keep clean areas clean.' For water, it protects the community's raw drinking water supply sources, and it supports aquatic ecosystems and Indigenous traditional uses by requiring water quantity and quality indicators to stay within the established natural range of variability. To help retain vital boreal wetland ecosystems, the Plan places stronger requirements on mineral lease holders and project operators compared to the loophole-prone provincial wetland policy.

To reach the Plan's intended outcomes, its most notable element is to cap the 'buffered footprint' of industry at 15 percent inside the 10KMZ. In doing so, it recognizes the extensive evidence that industrial features alter habitat far beyond their actual boundary. 'Edge effects' radiate out con-

siderably from a seismic line, road or forestry cutblock. They can significantly alter vegetation by altering water drainage, soil moisture, heat and light. They can cause soil compaction, erosion and promote invasive species. Such impacts can be more pronounced when combined with motorized recreation access proliferating in these disturbed areas.

Industrial edge effects can also change wildlife predation. For example, many industrial features increase the food supply and mobility of white-tailed deer, which in turn boosts wolf populations. Wolves and other predators also use these industrial features to move faster and deeper into boreal forests and wetlands than before. An overall result is unsustainably high predation pressure on woodland caribou.

In the Moose Lake 10 KMZ, geospatial analysts mapped each industrial feature and added a buffer around each one. Depending on the disturbance type, the buffer was 50 to 200 metres. The area left outside of the buffered industrial footprint is called 'interior habitat.' That is the pre-development natural landscape that's left to support biodiversity.

Using 2016 data as the reference point, the buffered industry footprint was estimated at 13.5 percent of the 10 KMZ, and the interior habitat at 86.5 percent. The

Table 1: Current state (2016) of the Moose Lake 10KM Zone: Intact interior habitat and buffered footprint

(hectares)	Total Area	Interior Habitat	Buffered Industry Footprint
Mixed-Use Area	56,203 (54%)	45,285 (80.6%)	10,918 (19.4%)
Reserves	7,780 (8%)	6,920 (89.0%)	860 (11.0%)
Wildland Park	39,582 (38%)	37,376 (94.4%)	2,205 (5.6%)
Total 10 KM Zone	103,565 (100%)	89,581 (86.5%)	13,984 (13.5%)

Adapted from Table 1, Moose Lake Access Management Plan, Government of Alberta, February 8, 2021.



Aerial view of Moose Lake. For nearly twenty years, Fort McKay First Nation has sought government commitment to a strong access management plan for this area. They have done so to protect their ability to practice traditional land uses since their main reserve on the Athabasca River is surrounded on three sides by tar sands mines. CREDIT: Fort McKay First Nation.

Plan allows buffered industrial disturbance to increase to a maximum of 15 percent; in other words it sets a minimum of 85 percent intact interior habitat. It further allocates the remaining allowed buffered disturbance between oil and gas, forestry and sand/gravel sectors.

Table 1 summarizes the current conditions. It's evident that Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park is a valuable land-use designation in the 10KMZ because it contributes more interior habitat and has a lower buffered industry footprint than the mixed-use public lands area.

However, managing the 10KMZ as an entire special management zone does create some anomalies. Development is prohibited within any wildland provincial park, so the "15 percent" permissible industrial development that would, at least mathematically, be applied to the lands in the park

has been reassigned to the mixed-use area. The total area calculation also includes Namur and Gardiner lakes on which, of course, development is impossible but a corresponding "15 percent" development footprint is also assigned to the mixed-use area. Still, this is the first landscape in Alberta to which disturbance limits have been applied and the inclusion of buffers is especially important.

The Plan also applies stronger reclamation requirements in the 10KMZ compared to mixed-use public lands elsewhere in Alberta. For instance, oil and gas pipeline operators must re-vegetate their pipeline right of ways within 5 years to pre-disturbance type vegetation, with residual corridors no wider than 4 metres.

Some industrial features are strictly limited within the 10KMZ, including:

- a requirement to locate central process-

ing facilities of energy projects outside the 10KMZ;

- no new petroleum and natural gas leases issued; and
- no new transmission lines or commercial recreation developments permitted.

For accountability, the Plan commits the government to generating publicly available land and footprint monitoring data. A Technical Advisory Committee will be formed to identify implementation issues and recommend further culturally appropriate measures to support the intended outcomes.

At this time, the Moose Lake Plan provides important policy guidance. However, it does not yet have the regulatory power of sub-regional regulations under the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) that is in force under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA)*. The Moose Lake

Plan states an intention to include the Plan's land uses and management thresholds in LARP "as soon as practicable." That is a crucial next step.

'Maintaining ecosystem function and biodiversity' is one of the strategic outcomes of

the 2012 Lower Athabasca Regional Plan. Much more needs to be done to meet this goal which is, furthermore, a commitment by Alberta and Canada under the International Convention on Biological Diversity. The Moose Lake Access Management Plan

is overdue, and sets a very encouraging precedent. AWA will be encouraging similar principles to be applied to meet critical habitat obligations for species at risk, and in enforceable sub-regional plans under ALSA across Alberta's public lands. 🐾

Community Voices on the importance of the Moose Lake area

(Source: mooselaketogogether.ca/community)

Community Elder Clara Mercer: That's where I grew up, that's my home. At Buffalo Lake I feel good. It's peaceful and I can drink the water there. I can eat the berries. We have family there; all my kids and grandchildren. We teach our grandchildren to go fishing and clean the fish. They go hunting for ducks. We teach them as much as we can about our way of life. This is the only piece of land that is not destroyed by industry. If we have nothing left, we have no way to teach them our culture, our Indian rights (Elder Mercer passed away in

the summer of 2020 and did not live to see Alberta approve the Plan).

Chief Mel Grandjamb: We have to maintain the core essentials at Moose Lake, make sure the berries and plants are the same as they were 100 years ago. That's important. Maintain habitat not just for moose but for lynx and wolf. Even the air and rain at Moose Lake are important. They're different. It's 800 feet higher and everything is clean. You can drink fresh water and eat the fish off the lake. Home is always back in Moose Lake.

Jean L'Hommecourt: Our ancestors preserved our identity, language, traditional

knowledge and culture – without technology, without paper – for generations based solely on lived experience and an oral history. It really inspires me, how they conducted themselves, making sure to pass those things on to their children. We need it to preserve our identity. We need roots; without roots, we're lost.

But Moose Lake is a very unique area. It's almost like the water is a life force out there that encourages these rare plants. This boreal forest is different from the Canadian Shield or the Prairies. For thousands of years it has had plentiful fish and game, diverse habitat. The plants we harvest there can't be found just anywhere – they can't even be found close to Fort McKay.

The Long Journey to the 2021 Moose Lake Access Management Plan

- For almost 20 years Fort McKay First Nation sought an access management plan to protect the exercise of Treaty rights and traditional land uses in the Moose Lake reserves area
- 2009-2012 - When the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) was being developed, Fort McKay Indigenous communities requested a buffer zone to restrict oil sands development near the Moose Lake reserves, but the 2012 approved LARP did not reflect this.
- August 2012 - Alberta committed in the new LARP that by the end of 2013, it would develop land disturbance standards such as limits and triggers. It promised to apply mandatory Integrated Land Management across all industries to achieve those standards. It failed to do so.

- August 2013 - the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) approved the Dover oil-sands in situ project. It included plans for a central processing facility 13 km from the Moose Lake Reserves, and for some well pads to be located within 1,500 metres of the reserves. Fort McKay First Nation and Fort McKay Metis Community Association had objected to the Project and requested the AER apply a 20 kilometre buffer around its Moose Lake Reserves. The Project then went through several ownership changes. In 2018, Dover's owner PetroChina Ltd. reported to the AER that it would be deferring the project until 2021.
- Feb. 2018 – the Alberta government releases a draft Moose Lake Access Management Plan for public consultation. AWA provides comments supporting Fort McKay First Nation's goals and many key elements of the draft plan.
- June 2018 - the AER approved Pros-

per Petroleum's Rigel oil sands in situ project, including a central processing facility located within the 10 KM Zone. Fort McKay First Nation appealed this decision.

- April 2020 - an Alberta Court of Appeal decision overturned the AER's approval of the Prosper project. It said the AER must reconsider whether approving that project is in the public interest after considering the honour of the Crown as it relates to the Moose Lake Access Management Plan negotiations with Fort McKay First Nation. It also stated that the regulator's future considerations of the public interest must consider the effect of projects on "aboriginal interests and adherence with constitutional principles".
- In February 2021 the final Moose Lake Access Management Plan was released.
- On May 10, 2021 Prosper withdrew its Rigel project application.

Environmental Commitments Made in the 2021 Federal Election

By Ian Urquhart, *Editor and Executive Director*



The following synopsis of environmental commitments are taken from party websites as of the Labour Day weekend and, where available, the published platforms of the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the New Democratic Party, and the Green Party. You may want to visit these websites for the full details:

- Liberal Party: <https://liberal.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/292/2021/09/Platform-Forward-For-Everyone.pdf>
- New Democratic Party: <https://www.ndp.ca/commitments>
- Conservative Party: <https://cpcasets.conservative.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/25132033/5ea53c-19b2e3597.pdf>
- Green Party: <https://www.greenparty.ca/en>

Liberal Party

Climate Change:

- in March 2021, the measures introduced by the Liberals in the 2016 Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change were projected to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 588 million tonnes. These promised reductions were 85 megatonnes short of Canada's Paris Commitment (a 30 percent reduction from the 730 million tonnes Canada emitted in 2005 or 511 megatonnes). The December 2020 *Strengthened Climate Plan* promises measures that would meet Canada's Paris Commitment. The platform promises "new measures" to reduce emissions to 40 to 45 percent below 2005 levels.
- the Liberals will introduce a plan to ensure the petroleum industry reaches

net-zero emissions by 2050.

- the platform requires the petroleum industry to reduce methane emissions by at least 75 percent below 2012 levels by 2030.
- the Liberals promise to ban thermal coal exports by no later than 2030.
- the platform promises to eliminate subsidies and federal financing for the fossil fuel sector.
- a highlight of the Green Jobs section of the Liberal platform is the commitment to invest \$9.75 billion in a green industrial transformation.
- continue planting two billion trees across the country.

Protecting Nature

- the Liberals commit to establishing 10 new national parks and 10 new national marine conservation areas over the next five years (and working with Indigenous communities on co-management agreements for these parks/acres)
- support Indigenous-led conservation.
- establish at least one new national urban park in every province and territory.

Other Commitments

- modernize the *Canada Water Act*.
- end plastic pollution by 2030; requiring all plastic packaging to be 50% recycled plastic by 2030.

Conservative Party

Climate change:

- hedges on the value of carbon taxes. I think it's fair to say that the message here is confusing. The platform states that pricing mechanisms are the most efficient way to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG)

emissions but also states that "Canadians can't afford Justin Trudeau's carbon tax hike." The platform says it will "scrap the consumer carbon tax backstop" but then seems to endorse a carbon price "starting at \$20/tonne and increasing to \$50/tonne but no further." Later the platform says that Canada should work with the United States on minimum standards for industrial emissions. The platform also says that Canada's carbon price here would be tied to those of the European Union and the United States. Depending on the level of progress there the Conservatives would "be prepared to set industrial carbon prices on a path to \$170/tonne by 2030."

- will work with the provinces to introduce personal low carbon savings accounts. Canadians will pay into that account when they buy fossil fuels; the money could be used to buy things that "help them live a greener life."
- forcing the sale of zero emission vehicles. Thirty percent of light duty vehicles sold in 2030 must be zero emission.
- investing one billion dollars in electric vehicle manufacturing in Canada and a further one billion dollars in hydrogen technology.
- introduce a "Renewable" Natural Gas Mandate requiring 15% of consumption to be renewable by 2030.
- introduce a tax credit to support the use of carbon capture and sequestration technology in the energy and other industrial sectors. The Conservatives would invest \$5 billion in this technology.
- the Conservatives also promise a

multi-faceted National Clean Energy Strategy, a Clean Buildings Plan, and will pursue ideas that will build resiliency and better prepare Canada to address the impacts of climate change.

Conservation:

- committed to the Harper government's goal of protecting 17% of Canada's lands through protected areas and other area-based measures (currently 12% are regarded as protected). Will seek to increase this goal to 25%. No dates set for the realization of these goals (in 2014 the Harper government committed to realize the 17% target by 2020).
- work with Indigenous communities to create Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).
- invest \$3 billion between today and 2030 in natural climate solutions focused on forest, crop, grazing land, wetlands management.
- ban the export of plastic waste and increase the recovery of valuable products from plastics waste.

New Democratic Party

Climate change:

- reduce Canada's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 50% from 2005 levels by 2030.
- create a Climate Accountability Office

to monitor federal progress, engage the public, and recommend how to realize climate change goals.

- retain carbon pricing.
- roll back "loopholes this Liberal government has given to big polluters."
- review federal financial legislation to ensure federal financial levers support the net-zero goal.
- eliminate subsidies to fossil fuel companies and redirect funds to low carbon initiatives.
- work with provincial and territorial governments to make Canada a leader in methane reduction.

Protecting Land and Water:

- establish a Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights.
- strengthen the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.
- strengthen the federal environmental impact assessment process for coal mining.
- ban single-use plastics and ban the export of plastic waste.
- pursue a Nature agenda, the key commitment of which would be to protect 30% of Canada's lands and waters by 2030.
- ensure the *Species at Risk Act* is enforced.
- support Indigenous-led nature conservation and land-use planning.
- focus forest management investments to

reduce forest fire risk and encourage innovation.

- force petroleum companies to pay for the cleanup of inactive wells.

Green Party

Given the Green Party's pedigree, the party's main website and associated webpages are tremendously disappointing. There is no link to a platform per se. You also won't find any information about specific environmental commitments by following the main page's links for: Action Centre, Media Releases, Statements, or Party Documents. The last post on the Media Advisories page was for a statement about Canada's Global Role in the Climate Emergency from Elizabeth May – it's dated **February 10, 2020**. The main page invites visitors to "Save the last of Canada's old growth forests" – that page is silent on what the federal government could or should do in that respect. The main page also invites visitors to support the Green climate plan with a donation. There is absolutely no information about the substance of that climate plan if you go to the page where you can donate to the party. To say that the Greens' website presence is tremendously disappointing is likely an understatement. 🐻

Featured Artist Albertine Crow Shoe



PHOTO: © A. CROW SHOE



PHOTO: © A. CROW SHOE

Grassy Mountain:

Is The Coffin Nailed Shut?

By Ian Urquhart, *Executive Director*



The bruises still show...of where I pinched myself after hearing the June 17th news that the Alberta Energy Regulator, through the Grassy Mountain Joint Review Panel, flatly turned down Benga Mining's Grassy Mountain Coal Project proposal. The Panel's decision came after a 29-day public hearing that stretched from October 27th to December 2nd, 2020. The evidence presented and examined during the hearing produced more than 6,000 pages of transcripts. The Panel's report ran to more than 600 pages.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the hearing was conducted entirely online. Alex Bolton, the Panel's Chair, said in his concluding remarks that through the exclusively online format, the hearing made "a bit of history." It's tempting also to suggest that, by categorically rejecting all of Benga's applications, the Panel's decision also made a bit of history.

The AER's decision took this writer by surprise. Although I thought Benga's case for the mine was weak on both environmental and economic grounds, I never expected the AER to reject the project (it's important to appreciate that this rejection came from the Panel acting as a provincial, not a federal, decision maker). I thought the best we would get would be what the healthy majority of previous joint review panels have served us – project approval with conditions attached, hopefully many of them. I thought the decisive battleground would be in Ottawa where we would have to convince the federal cabinet that, in areas of federal jurisdiction, the significant adverse environmental effects of strip-mining the Eastern Slopes for coal weren't justified.

The Joint Review Panel relieved the federal government of having to consider the project's effects on areas of federal jurisdiction. "In our capacity as a panel of AER hearing commissioners," the Panel wrote, "we find that the project's significant adverse environmental effects on surface water quality and westslope cutthroat trout and habitat outweigh the low to moderate positive economic impacts of the project. Therefore, we find that the project is not in the public interest."

Arguably the Panel's decision was a conservation landmark. It regarded the significant adverse environmental effects of Grassy Mountain with a seriousness Albertans, all Canadians for that matter, rarely see in any aspect of our regulatory processes. Given my previous vocation I was struck most by the skeptical view the Panel took of the economic benefits a Grassy Mountain coal mine would deliver regionally and provincially. The Panel's words should be quoted in full here:

In making this determination, we understand that this means that the expected employment, related spending and economic benefits for the region will not be realized. However, even if the positive economic impacts are as great as predicted by Benga, the character and severity of the environmental effects are such that we must reach the conclusion that approval of the Coal Conservation Act applications is not in the public interest.

This rebuke was stunning.

Misplaced Outrage

As expected, the AER's decision was met with howls of outrage from the strip-mining advocates. Among the loudest came from

Robin Campbell, the current president of the Coal Association of Canada and a former provincial Progressive Conservative cabinet minister. The AER had turned Campbell's world on its head. According to Campbell, the Grassy Mountain decision was "incomprehensible;" he also alluded to the possibility that it was "political" in some sort of questionable way.

Nowhere in Campbell's complaint about the Panel's decision does he address well the obvious – the fact Benga didn't persuade Panel members it could mitigate well enough the adverse surface water quality and species-at-risk effects its project promised to deliver. Instead, Campbell hoped we will believe the Panel ignored expert opinion and that it applied "inexpert analysis." The reality Campbell refuses to see is one where the Panel, rather than nod in agreement with Benga's witnesses and evidence, was more persuaded by the legion of experts who offered evidence against the proposed project. A more appropriate target for Campbell's outrage was Benga itself – and the quality of the evidence and arguments the company marshaled before the Panel.

And, with respect to "inexpert analysis," why shouldn't any Panel give credence to the observations of people like Jim Rennie? Rennie, a geologist by training, isn't a professional biologist. But, he has fished the headwaters of the Oldman River for many years and has detailed catch records of those trips. When it comes to expertise about the pure strain westslope cutthroat trout in Gold Creek I'd argue that Rennie's evidence should count at least as much as the evidence from Benga's fisheries consultants who visited the



Grassy Mountain, described by Robin Campbell as “derelict and disturbed,” is in the middleground of this photo.” PHOTO: © A. DES MOULINS

site on just a small handful of occasions.

Campbell also complains that the AER Commissioners ignored precedent by refusing to approve the project. Campbell omits important facts when he says the Commissioners didn’t follow what he called the “decades of precedent set by the regulator.” Rejecting projects may be an uncommon result of AER hearings, but it isn’t unprecedented. If Mr. Campbell read our Coalition’s final argument to the Joint Review Panel, he would have seen our counsel offer eight examples of petroleum projects flatly rejected after a regulatory hearing. Our counsel’s list was not exhaustive.

Furthermore, applications are to be decided based on their merits and furthering the public interest. Surely those criteria don’t make precedent a trump card. If society was a slave to precedent, how many unreasonable practices of the past would we be forced to endure today?

Faint Hope?: Benga Seeks Permission to Appeal the Joint Report Panel’s Decision

Under the terms of Alberta’s *Responsible Energy Development Act*, if an AER decision goes against you there is no right to appeal to the provincial minister or to cabinet. Nor is there an automatic right to appeal to the courts. It is only possible to appeal an AER decision like the Grassy Mountain one if the Alberta Court of Appeal gives you permission to appeal. In order to secure that permission you must convince a judge of the Court of Appeal the AER may have

erred “on a question of jurisdiction or on a question of law.”

Benga applied for permission to appeal just as the window to do so was about to close. It claimed the Joint Review Panel committed six errors in law. To this layperson, all of these alleged errors seem to be exactly the type of objections that Justice McDonald decided in *O’Chiese First Nation v Alberta Energy Regulator* (2015) were insufficient to grant permission to appeal. There McDonald wrote: “Questions of fact or of mixed fact and law from which no legal error is extricable are precluded from appellate review.” Benga’s application, in the absence of any Memorandum of Argument, seemed to question how the Panel interpreted the facts presented before it. One has to believe that the justice who hears Benga’s application will see that, in preparing its 600-page plus report, the AER demonstrated the knowledge and expertise to be expected of a diligent hearing process.

Ministers Savage and Nixon, Benga’s allies during the hearing, complimented the Panel for just this reason. They said the Panel followed “a rigorous review process” and its decision demonstrated “that Alberta’s legislative and regulatory framework is robust and thoroughly considers environmental impacts as part of any resource development project.” Benga’s application for permission to appeal the Grassy Mountain is scheduled to be heard by a justice of the Court of Appeal on December 8, 2021.

Ottawa Decides to Decide

While the AER’s decision relieved the fed-

eral government of the need to pronounce judgment on Grassy Mountain federal Environment and Climate Change Minister Jonathan Wilkinson decided anyways. In early August, Minister Wilkinson concluded “the project is likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects” and the federal government “has determined those effects are not justified in the circumstances and therefore, the project cannot proceed.”

Minister Wilkinson’s announcement was somewhat surprising since the AER excused Ottawa from acting. For now, we don’t know if Minister Wilkinson’s announcement is related at all to Benga Mining’s legal gambit before the Alberta Court of Appeal. Now, unless the federal courts overturns Minister Wilkinson’s decision, wins for Benga at the Alberta Court of Appeal shouldn’t be able to resurrect Grassy Mountain.

Electoral politics may help to explain the Minister’s decision to add another nail to Benga’s coffin. Killing Grassy Mountain offers further evidence the federal Liberals will take a very hard line on any plans to strip-mine the Eastern Slopes of the Canadian Rockies for coal. Arguably electoral advantages flow from that position and what it may signal for issues like climate change.

Looking Ahead to Christmas 2020

AWA’s concerns and opposition to a strip mine on Grassy Mountain are longstanding. We voiced those views before the original environmental impact statement was submitted in 2015, long before Australian billionaire Gina Rinehart decided to take over Riversdale Resources in 2019 for approximately \$700 million. Benga’s application for permission to appeal the AER’s rejection of the Grassy Mountain Coal Project is scheduled to be heard by the Alberta Court of Appeal on December 8, 2020. I, for one, already have written my letter to Santa asking him for a court ruling that will keep the lid on Benga’s coffin nailed shut. Then we can get on with the vital business of exploring more sustainable futures for Alberta’s Crowsnest region. ♣

Introducing Phillip Meintzer:

AWA Conservation Specialist

My name is Phillip Meintzer, and I am a newly hired Conservation Specialist with Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). I was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta – on Treaty 7 lands, at the edge of Fish Creek Provincial Park in the community of Woodlands, but I have spent the last five years of my career working on both the east and west coasts of Canada. I have a BSc in Zoology from the University of Calgary and an MSc in Marine Biology from Memorial University of Newfoundland (under the supervision of Dr. Brett Favaro).

Prior to joining AWA, my primary academic and professional focus was marine fisheries conservation and I hope to leverage my knowledge and experience from this discipline as part of my new role at AWA. My MSc research focused on improving the efficiency of low-impact fishing gears (known as traps or pots) to be used as a sustainable commercial fishing method for Atlantic cod in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). I spent two consecutive summers working closely with inshore cod fishermen in the beautiful community of Seldom, on Fogo Island in northeastern Newfoundland, to complete my fieldwork. My hope for my project was that fishers might abandon more harmful fishing practices – such as gillnetting, in favor of the gear we developed.

Following my degree, I spent three years living in Victoria, B.C., as a project coordinator with Archipelago Marine Research. Archipelago provides marine resource management services such as fisheries monitoring, and marine environmental assessments. My role there gave me the opportunity to work with the fishing industry, government agencies, and NGOs to develop solutions for marine resource sus-



tainability that meet the needs of all stakeholders.

I have abiding interests in science – as the process by which we learn and validate new information about our universe; education – for all people, regardless of age, race, gender or wealth, as a means for reducing ignorance and superstition in our society; and empathy – as a solution for many of the intersectional crises we currently face including climate change, biodiversity loss, and wealth inequality. I believe science and conservation efforts need to do a better job of centering the voices of people who have largely been marginalized throughout colonial history. This will help to ensure that conservation goals and objectives meet the needs of all people in an equitable manner.

Outside of work, my personal hobbies include spending time with my loved ones, being disconnected in nature, photography, reading for pleasure, writing (i.e., personal journaling), running, and cycling. I grew up – and to this day remain – fascinated by dinosaurs which means that my favourite ecological areas in our province have

always been the badlands.

I am enjoying the start of my role with AWA, and I appreciate having a career where environmental activism and advocacy is an integral part of what I do each and every day. To date, my files have included fish and fisheries, water and irrigation, boreal areas of concern, and oil sands monitoring. I have always wanted a career that would give me the opportunity to use my knowledge and experience to help protect and sustain Alberta's wilderness spaces so I feel very fortunate to have found my way onto the AWA team. 🌱

Featured Artist Albertine Crow Shoe



Blackfoot Warrior Horse Mask
PHOTO: © A. CROW SHOE

Tributes to Christyann Olson

Christyann Olson is an institution. I can't think of AWA without thinking of Christyann. She has lived AWA's mission for more than twenty years and has played an instrumental role in building AWA into today's strong advocate for conservation. Her passion and inspiration have touched the lives of many people...as reflected in the following testaments from staff, former staff, volunteers, and family. Congratulations Christyann on an outstanding career.

- Ian Urquhart



I was delighted to hear that Christyann has finally decided to take a well-earned rest from her 20 years with AWA, though this is tinged of course with an element of sadness at the end of an era and the retirement of an Alberta institution. I know that others elsewhere in this issue will be taking on the unenviable task of trying to sum up the huge impact that Christyann has had on AWA, and on the conservation of wildlife and wild places throughout Alberta, but I wanted to add my more personal recollections.

I am proud to have worked for AWA between 2001 and 2012. I arrived in Canada in 2000, having worked for the previous 12 years managing nature reserves in the UK. I learned pretty quickly that my UK work experience didn't translate very well to trying to get a job in Alberta, and I spent a frustrating year doing casual work – including gardening and working as a stone mason – while I tried without much success to find some sort of environmental work to suit my experience and enthusiasm.

I still don't know why Christyann decided to take a gamble on this eccentric English person who had no experience of Alberta and its complex environmental issues, but she did, and I will be forever grateful. I arrived initially on a 3-month summer contract, but ended up staying for 11 years! Christyann had only recently begun as Executive Director, and AWA at the time was a small organisation in flux. But it was clear even then that Christyann had a very firm vision of where AWA needed to go, and a highly supportive board who were ready to back her up.

It took a little while for us to shake down and my learning curve was steep. I like to think that Christyann came to realise that, even if I didn't necessarily go about it in a conventional fashion, I always got the job done! Very quickly I was welcomed as part of the AWA 'family' and it really felt like a family. My wife Jen was made to feel welcome whenever she visited (and was persuaded to volunteer on countless occasions, obviously!). That welcome was even extended to my border collie Meg who joined me in the office, and even when I got a second dog and then a third, Christyann never complained. (I suspect that if the dogs had come into work without me each morning, it would have taken a while for anyone to notice...).

I want to thank Christyann for 11 of the most fulfilling years I could have hoped for. The experiences I had will live with me for the rest of my life. A week-long backpacking trip in the Willmore Wilderness, a privileged day trip behind the scenes at the Suffield National Wildlife Area, leading 4-day trips into the White Goat Wilderness, working with the inspirational ranchers of southern Alberta... I could go on and on. My life has been much richer for my time spent with AWA, and I have Christyann to thank for that.

- Nigel Douglas

Well, Christyann — on to new adventures.

Can it really be 50 years ago since we first met? How fortunate to have you in my life all that time.

Every time I drive into the city I think about stopping for a visit — climbing to the top of that long quirky flight of stairs that leads to the back door of the AWA offices to see you — catching up on things personal and AWA related. Your presence, your openness and kindness encouraged many supporters and you had a knack for bringing people together in interesting collaborative efforts.

Retirement — a word with good intent but, definitely, it is not the best word to describe the shift you are making. Over the past years, I have used many others — “re-treading, re-trenching, re-invention, re-novation, re-searching”.... those, and more, necessary to describe the gamut of possible adventures.

With family nearby and a young border collie in your life I'm sure you and Dan will have little time to sit still. And I know that we will stay connected.

I also anticipate to staying connected to AWA as Ian takes the helm.

New adventures for everyone!

XO Col.... And Jessie.

- Colleen Campbell

My first real job was working for Christyann at Alberta Wilderness Association. To this day, I value everything she taught me and everything she exemplified. Christyann is a fearless and generous leader, a true champion for conservation and exactly the right amount creative thinker vs. pragmatic problem-solver. She taught me to think critically (despite youthful tunnel vision), to collaborate (even with those I perceived to be my adversaries), to celebrate successes (even tiny ones), and most of all, to be brave. AWA has had many successes under Christyann's leadership and has made a concrete contribution to wilderness and wildlife conservation in Alberta. She is also a top-notch camping and trail crew buddy! Thank you Christyann, I wish you all the best, and lots of fun, in your much-deserved retirement.

- Tamaini Snaith, PhD

I've done a variety of volunteer tasks for the AWA but the one that was the most stressful and interesting was the annual Climb for Wilderness at the Calgary Tower. And through it I witnessed the consummate skill and talent of Christyann. She was pushed to the breaking point with a hostile manager of the facility who, it seemed at times, didn't really want us there at all. Through it all she remained courteous and calm. My admiration for her is boundless.

And that was just part of the background preparation for the big day. My job in the early morning (5:30 am) was to secure keys from security to unlock all relevant doors. Christyann would be there at that time also to supervise all aspects of our setup and then be a trouble shooter for whatever little or big crises would arise. Some of them had to do with the facility, such as an elevator not working. That seemed to be a frequent occurrence. Immediate decisions had to be made about crowd control. Mother Nature sometimes wouldn't cooperate and we'd have dangerous ice on the race route or the re-entry to the tower by climbers. Whatever the difficulty, Christyann would consult with key personnel and solve it.

And at the end of a long day we'd gather at the old school house for an après celebration. Finally she could relax and thank us all for another good Climb for Wilderness.

I'm so thankful that I wandered into the 12th St office that long-ago day in September. I met a wonderful human being who has become a lifetime friend. Congratulations, Christyann, on a well earned retirement. And you know where I am on a Tuesday.

- Ed Hergott

When I moved with my wife and family from Pincher Creek to Calgary in 1985 for graduate school I had appreciated the access to the Eastern Slopes and rivers in southwest Alberta for years. And soon I discovered a local treasure trove in both resources and people at Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA).

The more I learned of the threats to our wilderness from government, industry, and human settlements the more I realized the importance of joining with independent voices for oversight on the fragile habitat and wildlife pushed to the margins of Alberta landscapes.

I later met Christyann Olson (AWA Executive Director) and came to appreciate her vision, strong personal presence, organizational abilities, and courage in standing up for the protection and conservation ethic that has been AWA's motto of 56 years. It was an easy decision to offer my support and join AWA.

While leading the charge on the various issues from Eastern Slopes policies to protection of threatened species, wetland conservation, and resisting coal exploration, Christyann consistently acknowledges her team and the many trusted partner organizations across Alberta. Her trustworthy and creative leadership meant that sometimes her 'team' included companies, government, and local communities serious about preserving these critical habitats. And being independent of government funding she could also challenge government policies that threatened these values.

Clearly Christyann understood that all decisions about land use are political and has been willing to challenge the dominance of business and development interests in responsible planning.

I, along with her staff and many Albertans, will seriously miss Christyann as a person of integrity, understanding and commitment to the importance of engaging all Albertans in protecting our increasingly fragmented and exploited landscapes. Very best wishes Christyann, from a kindred spirit, and hoping you get to enjoy more of our beloved wildlands.

And I don't think we've heard the last from Christyann Olson.

- Dr. David Swann

The first time I met Christyann and Dan was at a party at Dick and Vivian Pharis's place. We hit it off right away and I remember jokingly telling them they were my new best friends. Little did I know that was the start of a long friendship that included countless hours of volunteering.

Christyann has the amazing talent of putting everyone's talents to use. She can whip up an Gala, a stair climb, a Saloon fundraiser, or a casino with class and plenty of special touches. She is just amazing to see in action.

We spent countless hours on the gardens and re-doing the landscaping around the AWA office. She was never afraid to get in there and get her hands dirty.

I was always encouraged to do my part to help protect our wilderness through watching her devotion to her job. For Christyann, it was more of a calling than a job.

Christyann will be missed but her and Dan have earned some time to explore what they have worked so hard to protect.

Happy trails, congratulations on your retirement. With all my love...

- Heather Crone

This is to thank you for the sterling leadership you have provided to Alberta Wilderness Association throughout your tenure. There was never any doubt that those making a bad move for nature would have AWA to contend with.

Looking back over all the years of AWA, recent times could readily be considered the most challenging for everyone in AWA. That said, AWA certainly met the challenge. No doubt the people causing great concern will blunder along and continue to "shoot themselves in the foot."

That said, continuity at AWA comes to the fore, and the wisdom of naming Dr. Urquhart as Executive Director is obvious. Please convey our congratulations.

We join in wishing you a happy, healthy and long retirement. Sincerely,

- Tom and Shirley Beck

Christyann Olson was one of my first and longest lasting mentors – in checking my email archives that go to the early 2000s, I couldn't find the early records of my time there – it was BEFORE the beginning of time. Fresh out of university, AWA was one of my first real jobs – at a time when it was REALLY hard to get a job in environmental work. Christyann gave me a chance to do real science and I will be forever grateful for this opportunity.

My first job was to support a project on off-highway vehicle use in the Bighorn Backcountry. We set up trail counters, organized volunteers, and analyzed data. A few years later I went away to grad school in Ottawa but then returned to work for AWA again. Christyann was always encouraging me to take the next step – to try things out – from setting up a wilderness celebration fair in Bowness Park, to a travelling roadshow through the towns of the eastern slopes to talk about motorized vehicle access policies, to meeting new decision makers and managers in the government. One meeting sticks out in my mind, when Christyann and a few of us met with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. It was my first encounter with the political realm. Feeling both nervous and anticipating a show down, I kept quiet and was ready to duck. To my surprise, Christyann was able to forge a personal connection with the Minister, ranging from her proud past as a 'coal miner's daughter' to an invitation to the Minister to join her on an elk hunt! Through this common ground approach, Christyann was able to hear and be heard by the Minister in a profound way. Indeed, I think many of us have felt a unique personal connection with Christyann over the years. But make no mistakes, Christyann's commitment to her mission of protecting Alberta's lands is as unwavering as is her loyalty to the people around her.

To work for Christyann is to be part of a family that believes in you and forges strong connections between people and the land. While I am excited for her to take these next steps in her career, there will be no filling of her shoes. We can however, continue to be inspired by her dedication to us and to the wild places we love.

- Adam Ford, PhD

Christyann has made an extraordinary contribution to building AWA. It is a measure of Christyann's influence during her 20 year term as AWA's executive director that AWA members will identify many different things when asked to identify her most important achievement in that time. For me, as a board member of 14 years, it is her extraordinary success in building the financial strength of the organization that stands out.

A simple comparison of AWA's balance sheet for the 2000 fiscal year with the 2020 balance sheet shows assets increasing from a little over \$100,000 to \$1.24 million. That is remarkable financial growth, by any standards, during a period when AWA has done excellent conservation work and achieved some notable successes.

In 2000 AWA's financial position was solid but always dependent on the next fundraising event. Christyann recognized that AWA needed a substantive financial reserve to weather the inevitable difficult periods in the future without drastic changes to the organization. After her appointment as Executive Director she set about putting her own stamp on the donations program. Specifically, she has taken a personal interest in almost every donor, and has been tireless in encouraging members and others to include bequests to AWA in their wills. She has also been the driving force behind many different fundraising activities.

When in 2014 the City of Calgary announced it intended to sell the Hillhurst Cottage School, AWA faced what would either be a major opportunity or a possible crisis. The historic cottage school, completed in 1912, had been AWA's home for almost 40 years. If AWA was able to purchase the building it would go some considerable way towards securing its future. If the building was bought by someone else, AWA, and its considerable environmental archive, would be homeless. Christyann immediately recognized this moment as, not only an opportunity, but also as a significant inflection point in AWA's history.

Initially, it was important to ensure AWA had the chance to buy the building. She set about meeting with almost every city councillor. I accompanied her to many of these meetings. Some councillors were encouraging and some were not, but Christyann was determined and indefatigable. She asked the City for a first right to purchase the building, and, by virtue of AWA's long tenancy and exemplary maintenance record, she eventually got it.

Virtually all of the representatives of the City that we met with stipulated that AWA would have to buy the building for its fair market value, as determined by a valuation expert employed by the City. This meant that AWA would have to raise substantial funds through donations, not only to purchase the building but also to create a financial reserve sufficient to fund future maintenance and repair work. There was talk about the need for a mortgage and how that would be repaid but Christyann did not dwell on that. Largely through her efforts and leadership, the fundraising for the building purchase was a great success as many generous donors stepped up to contribute the needed funds and the building was officially acquired on June 15, 2015.

Of course, financial stability is not an end in itself but it has enabled AWA to continue to increase its effectiveness in dealing with conservation issues. The current campaign against coal mining is a good example. AWA's work has been an important factor in influencing the Alberta government in its changes of policy direction and, under pressure, seems to have provided a real level of public consultation on the issue.

Christyann has had many remarkable achievements in her 20 years as Executive Director of AWA, achieving financial stability for the organization is undoubtedly one of the most significant. I should add that it has been a very real pleasure to work with Christyann during my time with AWA, she will undoubtedly be greatly missed.

- Chris Saunders

When I announced the news to my family that mom was planning to retire from AWA, my daughter Abigail burst into tears. Her first thoughts were: Who is going to take care of the animals and the mountains, how will we participate in adventures, will we be able to go back to the AWA office? Her initial thoughts were that mom was synonymous with Alberta Wilderness Association existing. And indeed, when many of us think of AWA, we think of mom. Mom has been involved with the AWA in some way for 50 plus years! My brother Russell and I remember helping collate and staple pamphlets (before photocopiers did those functions), playing on the back stairs of the AWA office down to where the beautiful library is now, and going on many adventures with my mom and dad when we were young.

Mom took on the role of Executive Director in 2000. She told me "It is just going to be for six months while the Board finds someone to fill the role." That six months turned into 21 years. I have had the privilege of witnessing the passion my mother has for her work and Alberta's wilderness. She has been tireless in her efforts to improve the AWA building, to organize the annual tower climb (now Adventures for Wilderness), to plan the annual dinner and auction, to write grant applications – so many grant applications, to attend conferences, to prepare food for various events, to make connections with stakeholders from all sides of the issues, to bring awareness to Alberta's citizens of the beauty of this province, and to highlight what is at stake if we do not protect it.

AWA holds a very special place in mom's heart, and I know that in retirement she will still be connected, in some way, to this organization. Through her work, AWA has been a beacon of light when things sometimes feel dark and gloomy. She has inspired countless people, here and around the globe, to take notice of how precious our wild spaces are. I am looking forward to her having more time to share her passion for this province's beauty with her grandchildren. We love you mom. We are incredibly proud of you and everything you have accomplished.

- Heather Hadden

Christyann Olson is a conservation champion. The successful survival of a conservation organization is akin to managing a hothouse plant in a frigid climate – it takes a lot of care and tending. It is often a conundrum, look after the infinitesimal details, or keep the big picture in focus. Constant questions are hurled at you. What to do, when to do it, how to do it, who should do it, how much is enough and when should one walk away. On the bright side, in Alberta, there is never a lack of conservation issues that need attention.

This is what Christyann has accomplished for AWA and by association, Albertans, for almost too many years to count. She has accomplished this with deft style and grace, a combination of firmness and flexibility and with passion and pragmatism. That AWA has a large, loyal and giving group of volunteers is, in no small part, a function of Christyann's strategic thinking and her tactical touch. All of us, at one time or another, have received a personal note from her, thanking us for some small role we have played. The reality is she has been the "grease and glue" that motivates and binds us together in a series of common causes.

Under the iron fist in the silk glove, AWA has become financially grounded, reputationally sound, an honest broker of information, skilled in negotiation and a conservation force to be reckoned with. Not only is she passing the torch, she has made sure it is lit.

On Christyann's retirement she has conferred to us a substantial legacy and she deserves our sincere thanks and best wishes for a quieter, less stressful life.

Lorne Fitch and Cheryl Bradley

From 2003 through 2007, I completed several surveys in the Castle area of southwestern Alberta that were proposed, facilitated, and administered by Christyann. I believe these projects contributed substantially to the knowledge of rare plant species, of invasive species, and of whitebark pine communities in the area. Without Christyann's impetus and leadership none of these projects would have happened.

I recall fondly a trip I and my two horses made with Christyann, Dan, and their dog to Spionkop Canyon. We camped in the upper regions of the canyon where we enjoyed hiking and surveying its beautiful alpine ridges. We were successful at locating a number of rare plant species during our survey. I will never forget the pleasure of sitting around the campfire and enjoying a mug of wine with Christyann and Dan.

It was an enjoyable experience working with Christyann because she was always positive and supportive. I believe she was able to accomplish so much during her reign as executive director because of her ability to work with industry, government, and other groups. Her retirement will leave some large shoes to fill.

- Reg Ernst

Christyann gave the very best of her extraordinary skills and energy to support the people that made AWA, and in turn they gave their best to AWA. She was incredibly available and responsive to staff as we built our skills to speak for AWA in our writing, meetings, and field trips. Gatherings at AWA's Hillhurst cottage school were renowned for hospitality and home-cooked food, as well as learning and collaboration. When 'Music for the Wild' started, Dan expertly built the stage risers and Christyann expertly sewed the skirting around them. Christyann built community in volunteer suppers, chats with Hillhurst neighbours, countless hand-written notes of appreciation. I overheard a dedicated Climb for Wilderness volunteer say to her, "You know, I wouldn't do this for anyone but you!"

Christyann's decisiveness and tenacity moved mountains. Here's one example: in mid-2011 AWA learned that only thirteen magnificent male greater sage grouse had been sighted on Alberta grasslands that spring. Christyann resolved that we were NOT going to let them just slip away. With Cliff Wallis, she organized an Emergency Sage-Grouse summit of conservationists and leading North American biologists, hosted by AWA in September 2011. The resulting sage-grouse communiqué produced habitat maps and outlined emergency and longer-term actions (all of which should have been done long before by government). Next came sustained media outreach and public debate, then a legal challenge with valued ENGO colleagues, and ultimately in 2014 a landmark federal emergency protection order – a lifeline for Alberta sage grouse.

Christyann's generosity, camaraderie and determination will always be an inspiration to me.

- Carolyn Campbell

Christyann embodies AWA's spirit. It's October 2011. The SUV is inching over a rough dirt road, the pounding and droning of pumpjacks filling the air as I squint at the handful of printed-out maps in my lap and try to point out a route through the windshield. We're a few sections northeast of Manyberries in Alberta's southeast corner, south of the Cypress Hills, in the heart of the province's remaining habitat for the greater sage-grouse.

A week prior, while correlating the location of oil well licenses with designated sage-grouse critical habitat, I had noticed some questionable entries in the data – installations seemingly in places where they shouldn't be. Receiving no satisfactory explanation from the government of the day, Christyann quickly decided that the best way to get answers was to go out and find them for ourselves. So it was that, in short order, we found ourselves, in Christyann's own words, "in the midst of the industrial zone and the midst of some of the best sage-grouse habitat," doing what she has always done best: getting answers and being the environment's watchdog, holding the government accountable.

Seven years earlier, it's June 2004 and I'm walking through the front door of AWA's Hillhurst Cottage School for the very first time, steeling myself for a job interview in a field I know little about. I didn't know I was about to meet one of the most influential people of my life.

As is the case for anyone, I have had over the years the pleasure of knowing many acquaintances, friends, colleagues, and coworkers. Some of them have entered my life in some way, and then soon left, after a few years and having made some small impression.

Far fewer are those with whom I have gotten to spend decades, and who have fundamentally impacted the direction and philosophy of my life.

I write the above, because Christyann was that for me. She has been that for AWA, and by extension, for the environmental community in Alberta as a whole.

She has acted in innumerable ways as a steward for AWA and has been a steady hand through transitions great and small. But, to my mind just as importantly, she has been an encyclopedic repository of knowledge and history, as well as a compass adept at bringing that knowledge to bear so as to guide the way to the present.

When it comes to AWA, Christyann is corporate memory personified; any decision made – not only during the two decades she has spent as executive director, but the decades prior while she was involved as a volunteer and member of AWA's extended family – is accessible somewhere in her memory. There rests not just the decision, but the valuable context in which it was made, and the discussions and reasoning leading to that decision.

When it comes to a knowledge of Alberta and Alberta's wild spaces, Christyann is likewise a living, breathing reference book. For as long as I've known her, she has been the first person to whom I have gone with questions, and often the last to whom I have needed to. She was always available, and always knowledgeable about places, issues and history from any of the province's four corners.

It is this personal understanding of Alberta's wilderness that I firmly believe has been instrumental to any of AWA's successes throughout her time at the helm. It is this same understanding and sense of responsibility for the environment that has led her to be such an ardent advocate, and to push and push – and keep on pushing – against government and industry lethargy. She has often spoken about being "a thorn in the side" of this or that public official and on those occasions I have learned to detect the carefully-hidden delight in her voice as she suggests her constant, dogged pressure is about to yield results.

In 2013, in one of the biggest victories that I have experienced in my own time at AWA, the federal government issued the landmark Emergency Order for the Protection of the greater sage-grouse. The decision to issue the order was based on evidence, on science. It was issued because organizations like AWA pushed the government, through court cases and provision of evidence – like what we found a few sections northeast of Manyberries, in the heart of the province's remaining habitat for the greater sage-grouse. Because when answers from the civil service were not forthcoming, Christyann did not hesitate to get them for herself. Christyann's thumbprint is all over that order. It's what I came to expect from the embodiment of AWA's spirit.

- Sean Nichols

Introducing Devon Earl



Devon is seen here with AWA Past-President Heinz Unger promoting the Leave No Trace ethos in the Ghost.

I'm Devon, one of AWA's newest conservation specialists. I have always cared deeply about environmental conservation and I spent most of my summers as a child hiking and camping with my family. I inherited a lot of my love for nature from my father, an avid mountain biker, who was always just as excited as I was when we spotted some wildlife on a mountain trail or while driving along the highway. Learning about the devastating effects that human beings can have on the environment led me to pursue studies in environmental science and ecology. Ultimately, I always knew I wanted to pursue a career where I could make a positive impact on the environment, and am thrilled to have joined the team of conservation specialists at AWA who do such important and chal-

lenging work to protect our wild spaces in Alberta. My vision is to create a sustainable future where our wilderness is respected and maintained for its intrinsic value and for the enjoyment of future generations.

I joined the AWA team in May 2021, fresh from my Master's degree in Ecology at the University of Calgary. There I studied the effects of sulfur dioxide emissions on tree growth in Alberta. The massive decrease in sulfur dioxide emissions in Europe and North America is one of the few examples of an environmental success story. Huge levels of emissions from the smelting of sulfide ores and sour gas extraction and processing led to massive forest decline and dieback throughout Europe and North America beginning around the 1960s. Trees in Sudbury, Ontario

were killed and showed stunted growth up to 40 kilometres from smelters that emitted sulfur dioxide. Sour gas processing is the main source of sulfur dioxide emissions in Alberta where hundreds of facilities emit sulfur dioxide to the atmosphere while extracting sulfur compounds from sour natural gas. Following the implementation of air quality standards, ambient sulfur dioxide levels in Canada dropped by 92.3% from 1974 to 2015. Although Alberta emits the most sulfur dioxide of any Canadian province, the downward trend in emissions is encouraging.

Environmental success stories are important to point out in a sea of environmental devastation, because they show that change is possible. It's easy to get discouraged when we constantly hear about climate change, oil spills, ocean acidification, and plastic pollution. But, when people speak up for the environment we can make significant change for the better. I'm here to advocate for sustainable, science-based management of our beautiful Alberta wilderness; I do so not just because I care deeply about nature but also because I understand that our species isn't separate from it. We rely on well-functioning ecosystems for the food, air, and water that keeps us alive, and the wellbeing that nature brings us. Forests provide not only lumber, but also carbon sequestration, water filtration, flood mitigation, and oxygen. Biodiversity is more than just plants and animals that are cool to look at; It represents the strong, connected ecosystems that sustain life on Earth. For these reasons and so many more, I look forward to all the work I will be able to do here at AWA, one of Alberta's oldest conservation organizations. I hope to contribute a voice of hope to the people who are deeply worried about the future of our wild spaces in Alberta. 🌲

Updates

Fish & Forests Forum Update

The twenty-second quarterly Fish & Forests Forum, hosted by AWA, convened on June 24th 2021. The Fish & Forests Forum is a gathering of forest stakeholders (primarily ENGOs, community members and regional experts) to discuss forest management and conservation. The group has been meeting online over Zoom since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. This summer's forum focused on fish. Lesley Peterson, Alberta Provincial Biologist at Trout Unlimited Canada (TUC), gave a presentation on TUC's work on bull trout recovery; AWA's Phillip Meintzer updated us on Westmoreland Coal Company's restoration work in Apetowun Creek (Apetotwun Creek was devastated in October 2013 by the failure of a wastewater containment pond. At the time of that spill, the Obed mine was owned by Sherritt Coal).

Lesley's presentation started off by summarizing the modelling that has been done by Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) on cumulative factors influencing bull trout abundance. Bull trout are native to Alberta and rely on cold, clean water to live and reproduce. Because of large declines in abundance and the extirpation of many subpopulations, the Endangered Species Conservation Committee lists bull trout as

a Species of Special Concern. Lesley then described TUC's on-the-ground bull trout recovery work. Using cumulative effects modeling, TUC is able to predict where there is high potential to reduce the risk level to bull trout by methods such as improving connectivity, decreasing sedimentation, and decreasing mortality by angling. They restore areas of the creek that are disturbed by off-highway vehicle crossings, and take water quality measurements for sediments, phosphorous, pollutants, and temperature. In Tay River, TUC assess bull trout abundance using a variety of methods including electrofishing, an environmental DNA project with UofC, fish traps, and PIT tagging (Passive Integrated Transponder, a small radio chip). TUC also communicates their work through signs at campgrounds, presentations, and social media to keep the public informed on issues relating to Alberta's official provincial fish.

Phillip's presentation gave us a background on the conservation monitoring AWA has participated in at Apetowun Creek. In 2013, a tailings pond failed at the Obed Mountain Coal Mine, sending a massive pulse of approximately 670,000 cubic metres of wastewater into Apetowun and Plante Creeks. The streambed, banks, and riparian vegetation of Apetowun Creek

were severely damaged to say the least. The restoration work aims to rehabilitate the upper five kilometres of Apetowun Creek and release pure strain Athabasca rainbow trout upstream of a fish barrier. The goal is to ultimately establish at least 50 mating pairs. The federal government listed Athabasca rainbow trout as endangered under the *Species at Risk Act* in 2019; in March of this year the federal government issued a critical habitat order for this population. This species faces hybridization threats from introduced species of rainbow trout. Matrix Solutions and Hatfield Consultants are leading the restoration work. AWA conducted a site visit in summer 2020 and will do so again in summer 2021.

Following the presentations, meeting attendees participated in a roundtable discussion to update each other on their conservation work and upcoming issues that may be high priority to focus conservation efforts on. The Fish & Forests Forum continues to be an incredible opportunity for ENGOs, community members, and regional experts to communicate research, share knowledge, and collaborate on issues relating to fish and forest conservation. The forum intends to convene again in the fall of 2021.

- Devon Earl

AWA Comments on Alberta Draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan

On May 11th, 2021, the Government of Alberta (GoA) released their draft recovery strategy for Saskatchewan – Nelson River populations of bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) following the Critical Habitat order issued on March 31st by the federal government. This draft recovery strategy and the associated public engagement period was open for feedback until June 13th, 2021. AWA was pleased to submit a letter to the GoA outlining our thoughts on the

proposed strategy.

Bull trout are listed as Threatened at the federal level under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), and any species listed as Threatened in Schedule 1 of SARA (on non-federal lands) falls under the primary jurisdiction of the respective provincial or territorial government. The draft Recovery Plan seeks to satisfy this jurisdictional obligation by the GoA and the Ministry of Environment and Parks (AEP).

Addressing the recovery process as a whole, AWA would like to know more about the relationship between the federal

strategy and Alberta's provincial recovery plan such as how responsibilities are to be shared. This process seems to remove Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) responsibility for a large portion of the bull trout recovery program by offloading it onto the GoA. This concerns AWA since it appears like an attempt to avoid DFO's legal responsibility for the protection of this species. Unlike DFO, Alberta has limited legal accountability under SARA, since there is no stewardship agreement between Alberta and Canada to recover any SARA listed species other than the Section 11 conser-

vation agreement for woodland caribou. In contrast, Canada and British Columbia signed an agreement on species at risk in 2005 that outlined the roles and responsibilities of both parties with respect to species at risk protection and recovery in BC. A similar agreement was signed between the province of Ontario and the federal government in 2011.

AWA's main criticism of the draft recovery strategy focused on the failure to mention coal mining in the document, especially as it relates to the threat heavy metals runoff poses to bull trout recovery. Proposed coal mining operations seeking regulatory approval overlap with bull trout habitats in Alberta's southern Eastern Slopes. If the Recovery Plan hopes to develop strategies that reduce sedimentation, then coal mining operations should be prohibited within

the bull trout recovery area.

Other AWA concerns included AEP's selection process for recovery watersheds which would relegate other watersheds to permanent extirpation, a lack of ambition in the stated recovery objectives, inadequate metrics used to assess the success or failure of recovery projects, and no identification of – or associated protections offered for bull trout spawning habitats.

AWA made recommendations to try to improve the recovery strategy. They included implementing watershed-specific moratoriums on recreational angling to study its effect on population recovery, identifying habitats that could act as thermal refuge for bull trout populations in future climate change scenarios, and prohibiting logging in and around bull trout habitats to minimize soil erosion. The logging prohibition

would help to ensure that more groundwater can be stored to buffer against warmer temperatures later in the season – an important factor for bull trout survival.

The Recovery Plan, the first step in the recovery process, will be followed by an Action Plan; however, the government doesn't offer a deadline for the preparation of this Action Plan. AWA is disappointed with the decision to split bull trout recovery measures across two separate planning documents – the Recovery Plan and the Action Plan – since specific, actionable tasks could have been included within this Recovery Plan. Waiting for the creation of an Action Plan to outline next steps will only prolong an already overdue recovery process for threatened bull trout in Alberta.

- Phillip Meintzer

Cumulative Chaos in McLean Creek

On July 9th, AWA's Phillip Meintzer and I took a trip out to McLean Creek Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ) to look at the impacts of off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, logging, livestock grazing, and random camping on the land. We were invited out and accompanied by Dr. David Swann, who is president of the Fish Creek Watershed Association, among the many other hats he wears.

The McLean Creek PLUZ is located in Kananaskis Country. The many creeks in this area (McLean Creek, Fisher Creek, Fish Creek) represent important headwater streams that affect water quality downstream. McLean Creek joins with the Elbow River, which flows through the territory of the Tsuu T'ina Nation (Sarcee), then into Calgary, and finally joins with the Bow River. Fish Creek also flows through the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and into Calgary through Fish Creek Provincial Park where it joins with the Bow River. The water quality in McLean Creek PLUZ therefore has an impact on water quality for First Nations, Calgarians, and many other communities downstream.

Water quality is important not only to people, but also to the many species of fish that live (or lived) in McLean Creek PLUZ. Of these, westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout are provincially listed as threatened and require immediate, urgent conservation action if populations are to recover or even subsist. The McLean Creek area likely was prime habitat for these species, but they haven't been observed there for many years. A study on water quality in McLean Creek conducted by David Mayhood and Logan Boyer in 2017 found that the total suspended sediment concentration in McLean Creek was enough to cause a 40 to 60 percent mortality rate for eggs and the larvae of spawning fish (see the June 2018 WLA article by Logan Boyer). Total suspended sediments in the area likely result from high levels of OHV use and logging in the area.

McLean Creek PLUZ is a popular destination for motorized recreationists and was originally established for OHV use in 1979. Mistakenly in AWA's opinion, McLean Creek PLUZ is the only area in Kananaskis exempt from the Kananaskis Conservation Pass. This means that while people who want to hike, bike, or picnic in Kananaskis

have to pay a \$15 daily fee or a \$90 annual fee, OHV users in McLean Creek don't need to pay at all. This exemption makes absolutely no ecological sense given that OHVs have a much higher impact on the land compared to non-motorized recreation. OHV trails are an eyesore on the landscape and the associated noise pollution makes it unlikely that any non-motorized visitors – such as hikers or cyclists – would enjoy an outing in this area.

Though there are signs and barricades set up in certain areas of McLean Creek PLUZ to discourage OHV use on undesignated trails, the impacts of OHVs are painfully evident. Multiple trails are braided and have carved deep muddy ruts into the landscape. Signs at certain areas encourage OHV users to keep their "wheels out of the water" to protect fish habitat, yet a broken down bridge leaves OHV users no choice but to cross directly through the creek. This leads to erosion and more sedimentation.

Random camping in this area hugely impacts the landscape as well. Large trucks and campers are driven on dirt roads while people attempt to find a private place to set up camp. In one area with many random campers nearby the stream and banks

were extensively littered with broken clay pigeons – painted ceramic dishes used as shooting targets by firearm enthusiasts. Other trash, including canisters of automotive chemicals, food packaging, and bullet casings, also littered the ground and unsupervised cattle roamed through roads and creeks alike.

Recreational impacts, cattle grazing, and the many clearcuts in the area showing little regeneration leave us certain about why the fish have disappeared from this ecosystem. The cumulative effects of industry and recreation on the landscape are responsible. These cumulative effects have not been addressed in a way that could restore healthy populations of westslope cutthroat trout or bull trout to this watershed. Without serious changes in the way the McLean Creek PLUZ and other similar areas are managed, we will continue to jeopardize our species-at-risk and watershed health.

- Devon Earl

Perpetuating Myths About Old Growth

To justify forest management practices that contribute to unsustainability, Alberta's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry perpetuates certain myths about forests. Some of these myths surround old-growth forests. These are forests containing a large proportion of relatively old trees and shade-tolerant or mid- to late- successional trees. Alberta Forestry consistently pushes the narrative that old-growth forests are dangerous because they are particularly prone

to wildfire and insect infestations, they are unproductive, and they don't sequester as much carbon as young forests. These claims are debatable at best, and completely disregard the fact that old-growth forests are critically important for biodiversity and many species-at-risk.

A large body of research exists indicating that old-growth forests are very important for biodiversity of organisms such as mosses, birds, fungi, and insects. Old-growth forests in Alberta are particularly important for threatened woodland caribou, who rely on the lichen that grows in these habitats as their main source of food. The barred owl, a Species of Special Concern in Alberta, also relies on old mixedwood forests and acts as an indicator for many other sensitive species that rely on this habitat. Barred owl populations are expected to decline as old mixedwood forests become increasingly rare and fragmented.

Old-growth forests are also labelled as unproductive, and as needing to be replaced by younger, fast-growing trees. In other words, we have been considering old-growth forests as superfluous in the global carbon cycle. This assumption is challenged by more recent research which highlights the importance of old-growth forests as carbon sinks, sequestering carbon that otherwise would be in the atmosphere contributing to climate change. This carbon is not only stored in large trees, but in deadfall, understory vegetation, and soil.

Another assumption of old-growth forests – that they are particularly vulnerable to wildfire – may not hold water. This

assumption is based on the fact that old-growth forests contain a lot of fuel, including large live trees and fallen logs. However, recent research indicates that old-growth forests may actually be LESS susceptible than younger forests to high-intensity fires and that, when they do burn, the fire doesn't decimate the whole stand.

Short natural fire intervals in Alberta have been used to justify short logging intervals. However, logging regimes based on natural fire cycles don't produce the same age-class distribution as would naturally be present. Logging regimes based on a natural fire interval of 80 years don't leave any stands older than that age, whereas natural disturbance like fire, even if it does occur on average every 80 years, still leaves stands that are older than that by chance and in fire skips. These older stands are of key importance ecologically. To label them as dangerous and unproductive is completely misleading and may be regarded as a tactic to secure public support for increased logging.

Similarly, the government of Alberta uses mountain pine beetle as an excuse to conduct extra clearcuts, known as surge cuts, to prevent outbreaks. This happens even though research indicates that surge cuts are less effective at controlling mountain pine beetle than identification and selective felling of affected trees. This is just another example of the misleading narratives that are spun to justify extra logging in sensitive ecosystems.

- Devon Earl

Emily Pauline Johnson "Fire-Flowers"

*And only where the forest fires have sped,
Scorching relentlessly the cool north lands,
A sweet wild flower lifts its purple head,
And, like some gentle spirit sorrow-fed,
It hides the scars with almost human hands.*

*And only to the heart that knows of grief,
Of desolating fire, of human pain,
There comes some purifying sweet belief,
Some fellow-feeling beautiful, if brief.
And life revives, and blossoms once again.*



IN MEMORIAM

David Schindler 1941-2021

David Schindler died on March 4 after several months of deteriorating health. I have never known anyone who was more effective at speaking out for conservation and environmental protection. He was the best bulldog for the environment that Alberta has ever known. Dave's academic credentials were impeccable; a Rhode's Scholar with an outstanding publication record. Politicians feared him because he never missed an opportunity to criticize the government for naïve decisions that failed to consider the science.

Before moving to Alberta in 1989 Dave's research on phosphorus pollution and acid rain at the Experimental Lakes area in Ontario led to major regulatory changes such as banning phosphorus from detergents and reducing industrial emissions. Although Dave published his work in the world's leading scientific periodicals, he was never satisfied until applications of the research had influenced policy. And he insisted that science can make a difference.

After moving to Alberta Dave initiated research in alpine lakes of Jasper National Park, where he loved the fieldwork. But any issue related to pollution or the environment caught his attention. He and Ralph Klein had continuing skirmishes beginning when Klein was Alberta Minister of Environment and continued through King Ralph's tumultuous reign as Premier. Environmental monitoring on the Athabasca River downstream from the oil sands was a sham and Dave made sure that Klein knew about it. Ultimately Dave helped to secure an independent environmental monitoring board for the Athabasca. This certainly has not cleaned up the oil sands and contamination of the river, but at least we now have data.

I first met David Schindler when I interviewed for my job at the University of Alberta in 1998. What I recall vividly from our discussion was how he refused to accept funding from industry, timber or oil/gas. He argued that accepting funding from industry would taint results and it would be nearly impossible to keep industry-funded research objective. Dave was principled.

Dave and I shared similar backgrounds growing up in the U.S. rural Midwest, with a passion for hunting and fishing. Dave was a Rhode's Scholar at Oxford University studying under the Charles Elton for his D.Phil. I was a NATO post-doc at Oxford in the early 1980s when I got to meet Elton. But Dave and I had some differences of opinion on approaches to ecology and when given the opportunity we delighted in challenging each other. For example, Dave claimed that community-level ecology was best while I maintained that communities were best understood as assemblages of interacting populations. We were both right because trophic-level interactions go both ways,

of course, but we both loved the debates.

About 10 years ago Dave and I worked together on an article about the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline. Based on the tragic Enbridge spill on the Kalamazoo River in Michigan we learned how devastating the consequences of a bitumen spill could be. The mixture of bitumen with colloidal material in water results in the bottom of salmon-bearing streams being coated with bitumen, destroying spawning areas. Over 800 salmon-bearing streams would be crossed by the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline en route to the coast--the environmental costs of a pipeline leak would be catastrophic. Dave and I loved to fish for salmon near the mouth of the Skeena River, while pondering the risks from Steven Harper's obsession with pipelines.

Dave had an incredible ability to interface with government on policy issues. We need him now to confront Jason Nixon and Jason Kenney on their outlandish proposals for coal mining on the east slopes. The consequences of coal mining on limited water supplies and downstream water contamination with selenium are issues that would launch Dave into attack mode. We miss him.

Mark Boyce, University of Alberta

What is Adventures for Wilderness?



What is Adventures for Wilderness?

Adventures for Wilderness is AWA's annual program to engage Albertans in wilderness conservation. We believe an Adventure can be anything from climbing a mountain, to walking by the river, to enjoying the beauty of nature in your own backyard. Visit our website to learn about the Adventures this season and how you can support Alberta Wilderness Association.

www.AdventuresForWilderness.ca



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