



Alberta Wilderness Association

Celebrating This Place We Call Home



Tonquin Valley, Jasper National Park - Photo: Lindsey Wallis

The Alberta government recently announced September 1 as "Alberta Day," to be celebrated from September 1-3. Here at AWA we are in awe of Wild Alberta every day, and work hard to keep our Wild Lands, Wild Waters and Wildlife protected so they can be enjoyed by generations to come. Join us in celebrating just a few of the special, wild places here in Alberta and learn more about some of AWA's current work. We recognize the generations of stewardship of these lands by Alberta's Indigenous peoples and are grateful for their contributions to the protection of these places. I am privileged and humbled to be able to call this place, that my colonial ancestors named Alberta,

home.

We would love to hear and see your favourite wild places in Alberta. Share them by [email](#) or on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#). If you are interested in visiting and learning more about some of Alberta's Wild places check out our upcoming [Adventures for Wilderness](#).

Wildly yours,
-Lindsey Wallis

Alberta's Wild Lands



Suffield National Wildlife Area

Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA), has long been recognized for its ecological value. It is one of the few large areas of uncultivated mixed grass landscapes remaining and contains habitat for 28 species at risk. Grasslands like Suffield NWA are the most threatened ecosystem worldwide. Only 25% of Canada's grasslands are estimated to be surviving intact. AWA is working with Indigenous partners and CFB Suffield to learn more about the management of this vulnerable area and to discuss how to best protect and restore this precious landscape. [Learn more here](#).

McClelland Lake

McClelland Lake and the surrounding wetland are important both for aesthetic reasons as well as the diverse biophysical features and ecological functions they provide. The wetland complex includes several significant features - McClelland Lake, a large patterned fen, and sinkhole lakes. The watershed also supports rare plants and provides an important stop-over point and breeding

ground for many migratory bird species. This wetland area is part of the Lower Athabasca Region. The Government of Alberta recently announced the start of their 10-year review process for the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP). The AWA will participate as a stakeholder in this process by providing feedback and/or attending public engagement sessions. Regional plans are important because they help to identify and set environmental management outcomes for air, land, water, and biodiversity. A 2016 Report by the LARP Review Panel upheld First Nations' submissions that the current LARP was not adequately managing cumulative impacts of development. The AWA hopes that our participation in the LARP review process will help to ensure that the regional plan addresses both environmental and Indigenous needs – including cumulative effects. [Learn more here.](#)



Wood Buffalo National Park

Wood Buffalo National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and supports globally significant wildlife populations, including the threatened Wood Bison. To inform a UNESCO monitoring mission, AWA is spotlighting gaps in two programs. Alberta's Mine Financial Security Program fails to collect timely financial security to ensure oil sands tailings ponds will be reclaimed, while the joint Canada-Alberta Oil Sands monitoring program has not published timely, credible syntheses of cumulative oil sands impacts to wildlife habitat. AWA believes that cumulative impacts of Alberta's oil sands development threaten the outstanding universal values of this exceptional park. [Learn more here.](#)

Jasper, Waterton Lakes and Banff National Parks

Banff, Waterton Lakes and Jasper National Parks have recently released their 10-year management plans. These plans are important because they set the

management direction for these parks for the next ten years. AWA provided comments on the draft plans for these parks in 2021 and we are looking to see if our comments were taken into consideration. Ecological integrity must be at the forefront of management decision in these parks, which are important wild spaces for visitors and the many creatures that call these parks home. It is of utmost importance that these parks be managed as areas where environmental values are the highest priority. [Learn more here.](#)

Alberta's Wild Waters



South Saskatchewan River

AWA continues to engage with our partners on the ongoing modernization and expansion of irrigation infrastructure across the South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB). The Alberta Irrigation Modernization Program is the largest irrigation expansion in Alberta's history, and seems to be proceeding without any consideration for environmental impacts. Some of our concerns include the unknown location of expanded irrigated acres, the potential impacts to native grasslands and species at risk, the implications for in-stream flows and aquatic ecosystem health, and cumulative effects. The Impact Assessment Agency (IAAC) denied our request to designate the Chin and Deadhorse Coulee Reservoir projects for federal impact assessments. The next opportunity for action will come as part of the Alberta Environmental Assessment process. AWA is awaiting the release of the draft Terms of Reference for each of these projects, as this is one of the only remaining opportunities for submitting public comment. [Learn more.](#)

Eastern Slopes Watersheds

AWA has been advocating for sustainable forest management for decades, and this work is continuing today. The forests in the Eastern Slopes are particularly important for water quality and quantity. They are the headwaters of rivers that provide drinking water for millions of people downstream and important habitat for fish, including endangered trout. AWA is currently working to understand the basis for Alberta Forestry's push to increase annual allowable cut of forests by 33. We are advocating for a shift to ecosystem-based management. This means that forests are managed for ALL their values, including their ability to filter water, mitigate flow, and prevent flooding, rather than solely for their timber value. [Learn more](#)



Peace Athabasca Delta

The Peace-Athabasca Delta is one of the world's largest freshwater deltas, supporting globally significant wildlife populations. AWA believes that cumulative impacts of Alberta's oil sands development threaten the Delta and the outstanding universal values of Wood Buffalo National Park, a UNESCO world Heritage site. To inform a UNESCO monitoring mission, we are spotlighting gaps in Alberta's Mine Financial Security Program, which fails to collect timely financial security to ensure oil sands tailings ponds will be reclaimed, and gaps in the joint Canada-Alberta Oil Sands monitoring program, which has not published timely, credible syntheses of cumulative oil sands impacts to wildlife habitat. [Learn more.](#)

Frank Lake

Frank Lake Important Bird Area (IBA) is an important wetland for the nesting and staging of several species of waterfowl and shorebirds. Water levels are primarily maintained with treated wastewater from High River and the nearby Cargill Meat Packing Plant, which are monitored by Alberta Environment and Parks. In the spring, natural drainage from nearby streams and fields also flows into the lake.

Elemental Energy is proposing to build a 1600-acre solar farm within the IBA. Solar farms are a cause of bird mortality, and the siting of the project near Frank Lake raises concerns for the significant waterfowl numbers that use the site. AWA is working to block the decision to site on lands that could impact significant and vulnerable bird populations.

[Learn more.](#)

Alberta's Wildlife



Bow Valley Grizzly Bears

AWA has been working with a group of ENGOs to raise questions about the proposed Banff-Calgary passenger train. The group is particularly concerned that the passenger train will create additional negative impacts to wildlife habitat connectivity in the already stressed Bow Valley. The existing rail line already causes a significant amount of wildlife mortality through collisions. Grizzly bears, currently listed as threatened under the *Alberta Wildlife Act*, are one species that are affected by train collisions, partially because they some grizzlies feed on spilled grain on the rail tracks. Before this project advances, there should be a detailed plan in place outlining how wildlife and their habitats

will be affected by the train and how these effects will be mitigated. It must also be recognized that these risks to wildlife can never be fully eliminated. There is a need for mass transit options that would reduce traffic on the road, and we would like to see other options considered. [Register for our Bear Safety Adventure to learn more about bears in the Bow Valley.](#)

Ronald Lake Bison

AWA continues to participate in conservation initiatives for wood bison through our membership on the Ronald Lake Bison Herd (RLBH) Cooperative Management Board. The board is a multi-stakeholder entity that exists to advise the Minister of Environment and Parks on matters related to the long-term sustainability of the RLBH, including the sustainability of Indigenous traditional use and cultural connection to the herd. The management board has recently finalized its Terms of Reference and will begin work on the development of a management plan for the RLBH over the coming months. [Learn more.](#)



Sage Grouse

Greater sage-grouse, an endangered prairie species known for their mating rituals, are once more declining. In 2022 only 22 males were counted in Alberta and the entire population in Canada is estimated at 250 individuals. These birds are reliant on sagebrush habitat and highly sensitive to disturbance. Their decline is mainly attributed to the loss of prairie landscapes. AWA is trying to draw attention to the continued threats to sage-grouse from industrial, agricultural, and urban development. Most recently, these threats have been

from energy development and [helium extraction](#), which are encroaching on the last sagebrush habitat in Alberta. [Learn more.](#)

Caribou

Woodland caribou are superbly adapted to Alberta's foothills and boreal regions. However, they are threatened by industrial impacts that have fragmented and destroyed the older forests and wetlands they rely upon to avoid predators. If caribou have a future, many other species that rely on these ecosystems will benefit. AWA is participating in three caribou land-use task forces that are recommending measures to recover caribou to be naturally self-sustaining, while supporting Indigenous rights and environmentally sustainable regional economies. [Learn more.](#)



Dedicated to the conservation of wilderness and completion of a protected areas network, AWA inspires communities to care for Alberta's wild spaces through awareness and action.

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