

Alberta Wilderness Association



Annual Report

2021-2022



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President's Message

Once again, I have the privilege to report to you as President of the Board of Directors of the Alberta Wilderness Association. First and foremost, on behalf of the Board of Directors let me express our deep appreciation for all the contributions you make as members of the AWA to support the organization. We are very much a member driven organization, and your remarkable commitment and myriad contributions are essential to our success. I am always struck by how AWA members feel a sense of powerful kinship whenever we meet, and wherever the place.

I also take pleasure in thanking our staff team who have managed to keep making progress on so many fronts despite the difficulties imposed by COVID-related restrictions including the challenges of on-boarding new staff members during these times. Carolyn Campbell and Sean Nichols have been steady mainstays over so many years and in 2022 we welcomed Randi Ducharme, Devon Earl, Ruiping Luo, Phillip Meintzer and Lindsey Wallis to the AWA community. I encourage you to learn more about these outstanding individuals on the AWA website (<https://albertawilderness.ca/about-us/staff-and-board>)

Finally, the Board of Directors has the deepest gratitude to Christyann Olson who generously gave up her retirement status to step back in as interim Executive Director while we conducted the search to find a new Executive Director. We now look forward to welcoming Deborah Donnelly in this role, and a new era for the Alberta Wilderness Association.

Our financial position continues to be very strong. Thanks to the ongoing generous support of so many we have throughout the past few years established a reserve fund that is conservatively invested to maintain capital while growing the value of the assets. This is a significant accomplishment, and such a far cry from the early days of AWA.

The Adventures for Wilderness program that both raises funds and engages new members continues to thrive with an enticing array of year-round Adventures across the province. Many thanks to all those who participate in these Adventures, and particularly to those who act as coordinators for this vitally important outreach work.

Our strengths allow us to pursue the AWA's mission to "Defend Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action" with confidence in our long-term viability. Similarly, our many community partners can have equal confidence in us as a reliable source of information and support. Together we are creating a deeper and stronger commitment to a sustainable society.

Thank you, once again, for all you do to make the Alberta Wilderness Association a vibrant and effective voice for Alberta's wildlife and wild places.

With Gratitude,
Jim Campbell
President
Alberta Wilderness Association



2021 - 2022 – The Challenge of Transition

This year was one that had AWA showing the qualities, strength, and resilience that it is known and respected for. We are 57 years strong, and we are focused more than ever on our vision that people like you and me can and will make a difference as we *defend wild Alberta through awareness and action by inspiring others to care.*

The changes we have known this past year have been filed under the word 'transition'. Board members moved on and new and old board members alike stepped up and brought their skills, talents and passion to the board table. New staff came on board and were given the opportunity to grow, learn and be mentored by some of the finest conservation experts and advocates in Alberta. Long-standing and long-serving staff left the ranks. Some moved on to use the skills and talents they gained from their time with AWA in new areas, places where they will continue to make a difference. Some retired, only to find they were called back to volunteer or give a hand as only they could. As it always is, AWA has been incredibly nimble and we moved when needed to adapt, focused on our vision, and let our passion for wild spaces and wildlife keep us coming back day after day.

Whether it was the dreaded Covid virus that had some staff struggle with health or the disappointment we knew in our leaders and decision makers, we kept up and we did make an important difference. If there was ever an example of the mantra, we heard more often in the 70s than now, it was in the work of Carolyn Campbell as she applied with patience and persistence the constant pressure needed to make room for Indigenous voices and meaningful contributions on caribou task forces. We know her tireless advocacy is making a difference.

Our newest conservation staff have risen to the challenges of this transition to develop new and dynamic ways of engaging the public and those who care. They bring with them talents, significant education, and passion - how fortunate AWA is to have Phillip, Ruiping and Devon on our conservation team. Program Specialist, Sean Nichols has served AWA for many years in many roles and is often behind the scenes supporting and developing and helping all of us. His epic bike-packing trip to more than 80 parks and protected areas proposed for closure by our government was only one example of the strength he brings to this team of dedicated passionate people. Lindsey Wallis is leading on Events and social media promotion of activities, growing our followers and welcoming new members. As coordinator for the Great Plains conservation Network (GPCN) she extends AWA's help to an important grasslands initiative working with colleagues here in Canada and in the United States. Randi has, in three months, become an excellent bookkeeper and administrative support. This is a vibrant staff team that serves AWA well and is making its way through the transition. We are a force to be reckoned with and we have the respect and recognition of colleagues in every sector.

At times, it seems AWA's vision for a network of representative protected areas is poorly understood and even challenged by governments. We have worked to help them learn that our health and a healthy economy depend on a healthy, vibrant environment. We have dealt tirelessly with frustration on more than one of the files we work on, including species at risk, healthy intact forests, public lands, connected representative corridors, clean, abundant water, and fresh air to breathe.

Being invited back from retirement to help with the transition is an honour I hold dearly. It has been longer than I first imagined, and it has been good, hard work. All of you who have called and written and sent your support have helped more than you know. One of my last tasks as your ED has been to prepare this Annual Report, I believe you will find the pages of this report tell the stories of commitment, passion, and a belief in AWA. AWA is as nimble and strong today as it has ever been and together, with you, we are making a difference for our wild spaces, wildlife, and our future generations. Thank you for your part in AWA's success.

- Christyann Olson, Interim Executive Director



Board and Staff

Board of Directors

President:	Jim Campbell, Calgary
First Vice-President:	Richard Secord, Edmonton
Second Vice-President:	Frank Calder, Edmonton
Secretary/Treasurer:	Chris Saunders, Calgary
Directors:	Clint Docken, Bragg Creek
	Cliff Wallis, Calgary
	Gail Docken, Edmonton
	Jamie Jack, Calgary
	Brian Calliou, Bragg Creek
	Nathan Schmidt, Calgary
Director Emeritus:	Vivian Pharis, Cochrane

AWA's board of directors is composed of dedicated volunteers with specific expertise and skill sets that support the needs of the organization and the staff. The board is a governance board supporting the staff to achieve priorities and goals for the association. Their strength helps achieve AWA's mission. The board recognizes the value of diversity and inclusiveness and works actively to improve the board's representativeness.

Staff

Executive Director:	Ian Urquhart, PhD - Resigned February 28, 2022
	Christyann Olson, BN, MSA (Interim)
Conservation Director:	Carolyn Campbell, BA, BEd, MA, MBA
Conservation Specialists:	Phillip Meintzer, BSc, MSc
	Devon Earl, BSc, MSc
	Ruiping Luo, BSc, MSc - Hired January 2022
Program Specialist:	Sean Nichols, BSc
Wild Lands Advocate Editor:	Ian Urquhart, PhD - Resigned 2022
	Phillip Meintzer, BSc, MSc, - June 2022
Events Specialist & GPCN Coordinator:	Lindsey Wallis - Beginning May 2022
Admin & Accounting Specialist:	Lindsey Wallis - End May 2022
Admin & Bookkeeping Specialist:	Randi Ducharme - Hired June 2022

AWA's staff complement is excellent and is supplemented by individuals from the board of directors who volunteer and provide tremendous support to AWA's research, advocacy, and outreach work. AWA's permanent staff members were supported by casual staff throughout the year to assist with specific projects and outreach. Transition and nimble adaptation have been required by all staff and directors this year. New conservation staff have been mentored by our senior staff and board members. Recalling retired ED, Christyann Olson has been important in keeping the Association on track with its goals and strategic frameworks.



Conservation, Stewardship, Outreach, Strength, and Capacity



One of the protected areas included by the province on its list of protected areas being delisted - Twin Lakes Provincial Recreation Area. © Christyann Olson

AWA's board members and staff have made contributions to this section of our Annual Report. Thank you to Vivian Pharis and Cliff Wallis for their review and contributions, Nigel Douglas for copy-editing and to Ruiping Lau who created the accompanying Infographic summary of this year's report. The following pages highlight AWA's conservation, stewardship, and outreach efforts during AWA's 2021 - 2022 fiscal year. A section on AWA's organizational and financial capacity is included. The detail in this part of our Annual Report refers at times to AWA's historical activities to give greater context. This comprehensive approach to creating AWA's annual report as an historical record is a long-standing AWA tradition showing AWA members and supporters the work done, the progress made, the disappointments, and plans for the coming year.

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Conservation, Stewardship, Outreach

CONSERVATION

*"Only if we understand, will we care. Only if we care, will we help.
Only if we help, shall all be saved."
— Jane Goodall*

This report tells the story of critical ecosystems, threatened wildlife and AWA's dedicated conservation activism. The power of the people to make conservation and our environment part of the conversation and the decisions being made is as important today as it ever was.

Since AWA was founded in 1965, we have devoted ourselves to understanding, caring, and helping. A healthy future for the natural world depends on ensuring that the public and decision makers understand the importance of wild spaces, want to care for them, and want to help preserve or restore them.

The magnitude of the conservation crisis has fueled public outrage over proposals to reduce red tape or strip mine coal along the Eastern Slopes. Albertans have an increased awareness and dissatisfaction with decision makers, and they are taking a stand. That opposition, your voice on conservation issues, compels decision makers to pay attention.

This section of our Annual report testifies to AWA's consistent efforts to speak out on behalf of wild spaces and wildlife. Those efforts are not possible without your support. Thank you.



Wild Spaces

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

Wild Alberta Map

“Wild Spaces” and “Areas of Concern” are terms AWA uses to refer to areas critical to achieving a network of protected landscapes in Alberta that represents Alberta’s six Natural Regions. These areas and the networks they can create are the basis of our Wild Alberta map; the map constitutes AWA’s strategic conservation vision.

The map has evolved through the years from hand-drawn “bubbles” to today’s more refined version that uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to detail known critical values, such as Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) on Alberta’s landscapes.

The Wild Alberta map is complemented by an interactive webmap you can access here: albertawilderness.ca/wild-alberta/. The interactive map depicts Alberta’s Natural Regions, the percentage of each natural region currently protected, and the amounts of these regions that would be protected by formally adopting AWA’s Areas of Concern. The maps encourage users, from government officials to engaged citizens to students, to browse through the Natural Regions, toggle the visibility of the Protected Areas and Areas of Concern, and learn more about Areas of Concern through linked webpages. Maps are among AWA’s most effective educational tools.

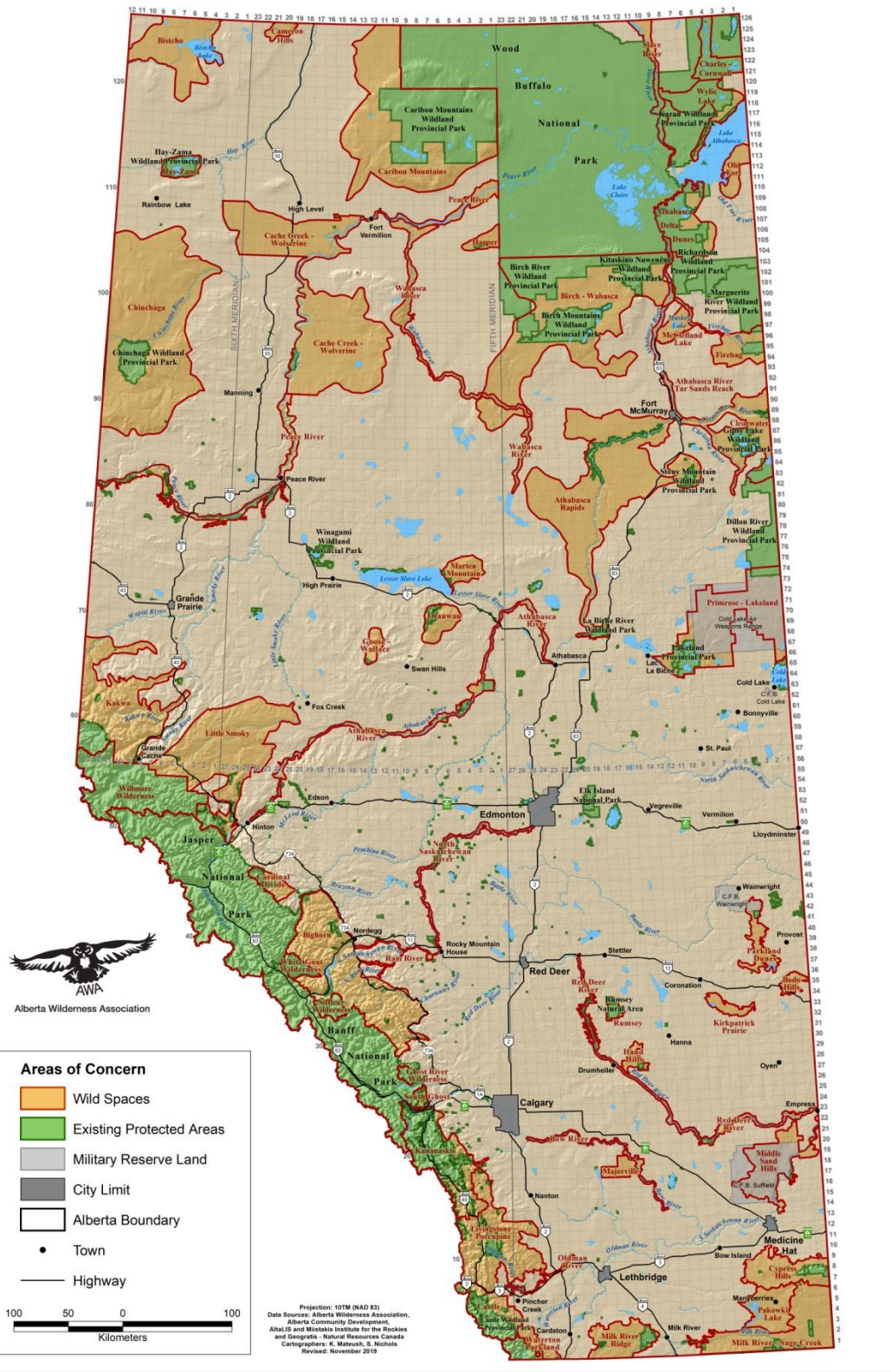
The late Dr. Herb Kariel, professor, geographer, and Board of Director emeritus never failed to remind us of the value of a map, no matter how simple. In 2017 he left AWA a significant bequest we have invested in our mapping tools. We gratefully dedicate our mapping work to his memory.



Wild Alberta



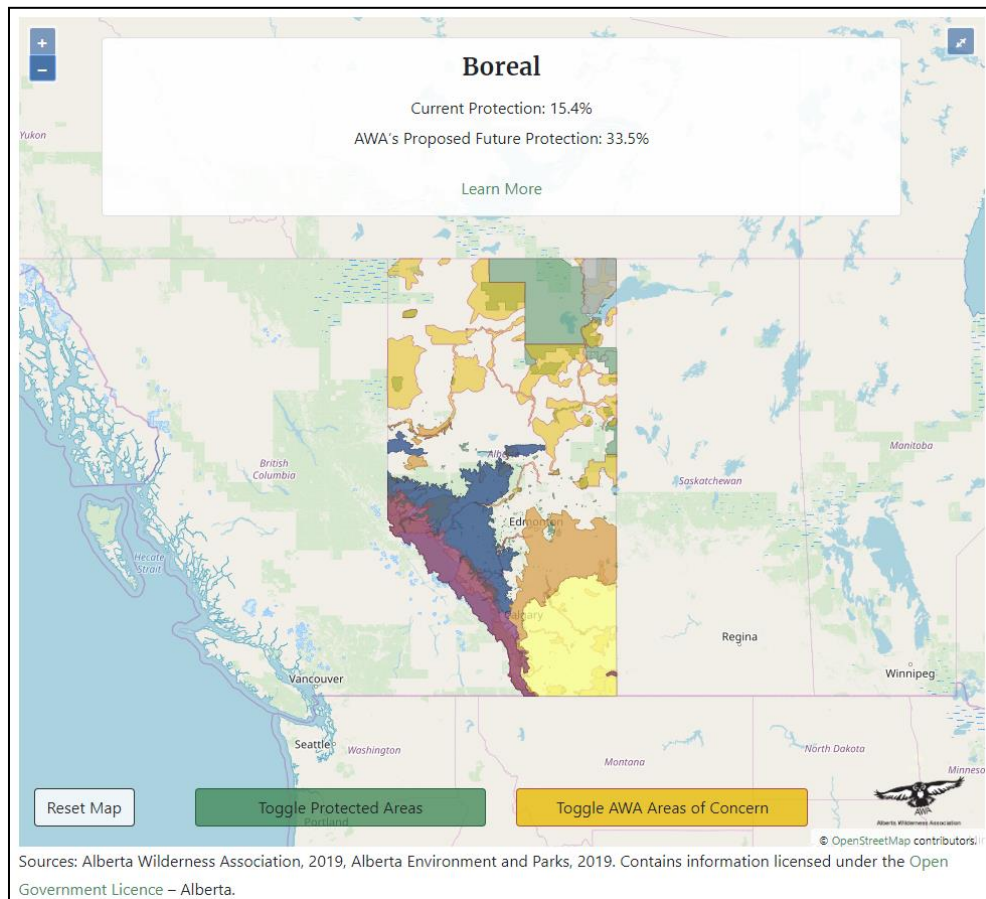
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AWA



AWA's Wild Alberta Interactive Map - each of the natural regions may be selected and explored. The map details current levels of protection for each region and the additional protection AWA believes is needed to complete a sustainable network of protected wild spaces.

Areas and Issues of Concern

BOREAL REGION

Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region covers 381,000 km², more than 57 percent of the province. In 2018, Alberta reported that 15.4 percent of the Boreal Natural Region was protected. Seventy-seven percent of that protection is found within the 44,807 square kilometres of Wood Buffalo National Park. Protection is not evenly distributed amongst the eight boreal subregions and ranges from 93.8 percent protection of the Peace-Athabasca Delta Subregion to 1.5 percent of the Dry Mixedwood Subregion. Protecting AWA's proposed wild spaces within the boreal could bring the total to 33.5 percent. In December 2019 the federal government committed to conserve 25 percent of Canada's land by 2025, an increase from the "at least 17 percent protection by 2020 target" Canada set at the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010. For its part, the Government of Alberta also committed to protect 17 percent of Alberta's landscape.

The boreal forest is Canada's largest ecosystem, covering 58 percent of the country. Boreal old-growth forests and wetland ecosystems are vital for the habitat they provide for wildlife and their water filtration and carbon storage functions. More than 200 billion tonnes of carbon are stored in boreal trees, soils, water and peat. There is much more to be learned about boreal wildlife including birds and waterfowl.

AWA is committed to maintaining healthy and intact forest ecosystems that will sustain biological diversity and viable wildlife populations, provide clean drinking water, and promote long-term economic opportunities. AWA supports responsible ecosystem-based forest management that does not compromise wildlife and wilderness values. AWA believes that the Boreal Forest Natural Region of Alberta requires thoughtful management that integrates the social and economic needs of the region within a framework that prioritizes conserving the ecological integrity for generations to come.

In April 2022, AWA participated in a kickoff meeting for the newly formed Responsible Tailings Management Alliance (RTMA) – a coalition of concerned groups focused on the issue of oil sands tailings. This introductory session was the first larger meeting for organizations interested in ongoing participation as the group looks to prepare for the imminent release of tailings effluent discharge regulations by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). The RTMA intends to serve as an information sharing hub for organizations to collaborate and strategize cohesively on this important issue. AWA are intending to participate in the RTMA in an ongoing capacity as we do not support the plan by both the federal and provincial governments to allow for the release of harmful effluent back into our already stressed aquatic ecosystems.

On October 25, 2021, the Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) – Jason Nixon – reaffirmed Alberta's intent to sell 15,000 acres of publicly-owned land to Mackenzie County in northern Alberta. This process began in 2010 when former Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach promised to sell a total of 136,200 acres to Mackenzie County as part of a land transfer between the White and Green Areas. AWA and CPAWS Northern Alberta released a joint statement in February 2012 opposing this land sale, as it risks destroying native boreal forests for the creation of new agricultural lands.



Birch Wabasca

Situated just south of Wood Buffalo National Park, the Birch-Wabasca wilderness is one of the most diverse and relatively intact boreal hill systems in northern Alberta. Its numerous wetlands, shallow lakes and mixedwood forest areas provide valuable wildlife habitat.

AWA's vision for Birch-Wabasca includes the restoration of legacy industrial exploration and development impacts, an expansion of Wildland Provincial Park designation across a large, connected area of Birch-Wabasca, and meaningful Indigenous leadership and co-management of these lands.

In August 2021 the federal government, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) and Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN) released for public comment a Conservation Agreement they had negotiated for boreal woodland caribou. Such agreements are enabled under section 11 of Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA). AWA strongly supports this Agreement, which we believe has the potential to greatly benefit four important northeast Alberta caribou populations and ranges: The East Side Athabasca River (ESAR), West Side Athabasca River (WSAR), Red Earth and Richardson. The Agreement affirms and advances the essential role of the ACFN and MCFN in the recovery and protection of boreal caribou and their habitats. An article was published in the Fall 2021 issue of the Wildlands Advocate for more details.

In late January 2022, the Government of Alberta officially approved the large expansion of Kitaskino Nuwenënë Wildland Provincial Park (KN WPP). This achievement was a collaborative effort on behalf of Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN), the governments of Canada and Alberta, and three oil sands companies. KN WPP is situated south of Wood Buffalo National Park and the expansion area encompasses 1520 square kilometers – doubling its original area. AWA is supportive of the intent to prioritize conservation and the exercise of Indigenous treaty rights and traditional land uses. We encourage the Government of Alberta to proceed with establishing a cooperative management process for KN WPP with local Indigenous communities that includes co-governance, along with funding and planning support.

Bistcho

The Bistcho region in the northwestern corner of Alberta is a diverse subarctic wetland that is highly sensitive to human activities. Bistcho Lake is one of Alberta's largest lakes, supporting northern pike, walleye, and whitefish. The threatened Bistcho boreal woodland caribou population relies on this landscape and its connectivity to adjoining BC and NWT caribou ranges. Parts of Bistcho remain fairly intact wilderness while other areas have been fragmented by energy industry disturbance. According to the Alberta government, the Bistcho caribou range was 91% disturbed by human footprint as of late 2017, mostly from historic seismic line disturbance. Bistcho currently has no protected areas.

In April 2022, the Government of Alberta released two long-awaited land-use plans for threatened woodland caribou. The plans apply to the Cold Lake sub-region in northeast Alberta, and the Bistcho Lake sub-region in northwest Alberta. AWA recognizes that these caribou range plans show a positive shift by Alberta. They set out how the combined impacts of industrial infrastructure, cut-blocks, and other human access will be tracked, coordinated, and reduced. These actions will eventually regain important intact, connected wetland and older forest areas that caribou require in their home ranges.



AWA participated in the development of these plans, but we are very concerned about significant gaps present in the final versions. First, there must be a much stronger commitment to a process of collaborating with Indigenous communities to support their land-use goals. Second, it is unclear when minimum caribou habitat goals are met, especially for Cold Lake. Crucial specific targets are lacking in the first 5-10 years and in subsequent decades for maintaining existing good ('biophysical') caribou habitat and reducing overall habitat disturbance. As a result, AWA believes that caribou critical habitat still lacks the effective protection required under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. It also means that Alberta's over-reliance on drastic annual wolf culls in the Cold Lake area will continue for far too long, to enable the caribou to survive until their habitat conditions improve. Third, future wildfire disturbance appears to be ignored in each of these fire-affected sub-regions. This means the plans are unlikely to reach the minimum habitat conditions for self-sustaining caribou outlined in the federal boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy.

AWA will continue to seek stronger processes that support Indigenous land-use priorities and set firm timelines for habitat actions, as we work together to protect threatened woodland caribou in Alberta.

Cache Creek Wolverine

Located east of Chinchaga in northwestern Alberta, AWA's Cache Creek-Wolverine Area of Concern is a mosaic of vegetative communities that supports a diverse array of animal species in the midst of many agricultural communities. Skirting around the productive waterways of the Peace River, the Cache Creek-Wolverine wilderness is 11,291 km² within the Boreal Forest Natural Region of Alberta and, as such, encompasses many different ecosystems and wildlife ranges. AWA believes protecting this wilderness is vital to conserving Alberta's northern wilderness given its high biological diversity in both plant and animal communities, in addition to its rich cultural history.

AWA has connections with the Hungry Bend Sandhills Society, a local grassroots organization that has long advocated for increased protection and improved land-use management for the sensitive local wilderness. The group helps keep AWA more aware of current land-use practices and demands.

Cameron Hills

Cameron Hills is a secluded and biologically rich wilderness in northern Alberta, adjacent to the provincial border of the Northwest Territories. Directly west of the Wood Buffalo National Park, Cameron Hills is 309 km² of boreal forest uplands, known for its striking and unique glacial flutings that are carved into the landscape. This wilderness encompasses multiple Boreal subregions, which host a unique ensemble of bird species in addition to providing vital habitat for threatened Woodland caribou.

The small settlement of Indian Cabins is the closest Albertan community aside from the hamlet of Enterprise, and the Hay River Dene Reserve across the provincial border in the Northwest Territories. A considerable amount of the Cameron Hills landscape has been subject to surface disturbances by the petroleum industry with exploration and developments generating an increasingly fragmented and degraded landscape.



Caribou Mountains

Caribou Mountains Wildland Park (5,910 km²) is located west of Wood Buffalo National Park. The area contains sensitive wetlands, fragile permafrost, and rare fens and palsas (peaty permafrost mounds containing a core of alternating layers of segregated ice and peat or mineral soil material). The relatively undisturbed, lichen-rich forests provide crucial habitat for an important population of endangered woodland caribou that ranges over almost all the Wildland Park. The park is also home to wood bison with approximately 200 individuals residing in the Wentzel Lake area. Except for Ronald Lake and the Bison Management Area in northwestern Alberta, which contain herds that are disease-free and are classified as endangered under *Alberta's Wildlife Act*, wood bison roaming outside of these boundaries can be hunted year-round. Hunting of wood bison within Caribou Mountains Wildland Park is prohibited except for Indigenous hunters.

Due to the area's isolation, and lack of good biological information, AWA believes the Caribou Mountains are vulnerable to exploitation. The area contains substantial damage from geophysical exploration. Timber harvesting is occurring outside the Wildland Park along the southern edge of the caribou range, and trapping, hunting, and guiding outfitting occur in the park. The park's caribou herd has declined by about seven percent per year from 2007 to 2017 (according to the 2017 Alberta draft provincial caribou range plan) and increased motorized access would further stress this endangered species. If the insulating organic cover is disturbed by human activity, the permafrost beneath can melt. This damages vegetation, soils, and the water flow regime.

In 2006 AWA participated in the local advisory committee working to finalize the draft management plan for the Wildland Park and submitted extensive suggestions to support maintaining the area in its relatively undisturbed state. As of August 2021, despite assurances, the draft management plan has still not been produced.

The 2017 Alberta draft provincial caribou range plan noted that 45 percent of the range was disturbed by fire, and 37 percent was disturbed by seismic lines and forestry cutblocks, leaving only 35 percent of critical habitat undisturbed; to be self-sustaining, caribou require a minimum of 65 percent undisturbed habitat.

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



Chinchaga

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

AWA seeks solutions to recover Chinchaga's wild spaces and sensitive wildlife while valuing community economic concerns. Extending permanent protection to the P8 Forest Management Unit (FMU) north of the existing 800 km² Chinchaga Wildland Provincial Park would expand the Park fivefold, with no impact to regional forestry and minimal impact to energy leases. The Alberta government committed to this protection in June 2016, and in December 2017 it proposed this FMU as a candidate protected area, but it has not followed through. Current and future commercial activity in the caribou range could be compatible with caribou recovery if clustering and reduced infrastructure disturbance is required. Local employment opportunities from reclaiming historic seismic lines and abandoned wells would renew the landscape's capacity to support wildlife, store water and carbon, and be resilient to climate change.

The Government of Alberta established the Chinchaga caribou sub-regional task force in 2021 and AWA was selected, and agreed, to participate on this task force. It was announced in May 2022, that the Chinchaga Caribou Sub-Regional Task Force would begin meeting towards the end of June 2022. The Government of Alberta created caribou task forces starting in 2019 to advise government on land-use planning at a local scale, including caribou recovery actions. Each task force includes representatives from local municipalities, Indigenous communities and organizations, the energy sector, the forestry sector, trappers, recreational users, environmental non-government organizations, and other local stakeholders and knowledge holders. Recommendations from these task forces will support the development of sub-regional plans for the respective planning area. AWA has participated on four caribou sub-regional task forces to-date, including Cold Lake, Bistcho, Berland, and Wandering River. We are looking forward to our participation on the Chinchaga task force as this important process for caribou recovery gets underway.

Hay-Zama

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



As an active member of the Hay-Zama Committee (which includes representatives from the Dene Tha' First Nation community, government, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and the energy industry) AWA helped hold the oil and gas industry accountable for meeting their commitment to complete their extraction activities three years ahead of schedule and begin reclamation. Considerable work remains to re-establish the ecological integrity of the area. AWA continues to work with the committee and to ensure that remediation of the Hay- Zama wilderness proceeds on schedule despite the financial challenges.

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

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

In January 2022, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) announced that the Dene Tha' First Nation (DTFN) were awarded funding through their Indigenous Habitat Participation Program (IHPP). AWA aided DTFN in the development of their proposal for DFO, and we are excited to participate in this project over the summer of 2022. The goals of the project are to establish a baseline monitoring system for fish, fish habitat, and water within a region of Alberta which is currently considered data-poor. In the process of establishing the monitoring system, DTFN is planning to develop community-led tools and community engagement processes for both elders and youth, educators, school students, and other invited groups. AWA is thrilled to see this project proceeding, and we are looking forward to supporting DTFN in their efforts to better understand and protect fish and fish habitat on their traditional territory.

McClelland Lake Wetland Complex

McClelland Lake and its adjacent wetlands form an outstanding wetland complex at the northern edge of Alberta’s tar sands mineable region, 85 km north of Fort McMurray. Its lake and wetlands are significant natural freshwater bodies along the Lower Athabasca River valley, a major North American migratory flyway. Many bird species stop there on route to the globally significant Peace-Athabasca Delta, others nest within the wetland complex. Its large groundwater-fed patterned fens are strikingly beautiful, featuring long rows of treed peat ridges separated by shallow water pools. It has some of the deepest peat soils in Alberta, formed over the millennia since the last glacial era. AWA’s vision is for the entire 330-km² McClelland



watershed to be designated as a Provincial Park, with its two patterned fens designated as Ecological Reserves.

The main threat to the McClelland Lake Wetlands Complex (MLWC) is from potential open pit mining of its upper area and its contributing watershed by Suncor's Fort Hills oil sands mine. To receive approval to mine the upper McClelland watershed, Suncor must demonstrate how it will maintain water levels, flows and chemistry in the unmined half of the McClelland patterned fen. In December 2021, Suncor submitted their Operational Plan for the sustainability of the non-mined portion of the MLWC to the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER). Suncor is expecting AER's approval of their Operational Plan by early 2023 to meet their timelines to begin ditching and draining in the MLWC by their intended start date in 2025.

AWA continues to seek a stronger provincial wetland policy that will deliver on its stated outcome to protect wetlands of the highest value for the long-term benefit of Albertans. AWA cites the lack of protection for the outstanding McClelland wetlands as evidence this is still far from the case.

In December 2021, AWA reviewed many of the foundational documents created to guide the development of this project, including the 2002 Energy and Utilities Board Decision Report, the December 2015 Alberta Water Act Approval issued to Fort Hills Energy Corporation, and Suncor's 2018 Conceptual Operational Plan – also known as the proposal to develop an Operational Plan for the sustainability of the non-mined portion of the MLWC. Our reading of these documents has allowed us to recognize four key commitments – among many others, which AER should ensure are satisfied before authorizing Suncor's proposed MLWC Operational Plan. The Operational Plan should not be authorized by AER if any of these commitments have not been adequately addressed.

AWA received copy of Suncor's Operational Plan on January 28, 2022. We are in the process of arranging a team of experts to conduct an independent, third-party review of the Operational Plan to better understand the technical aspects of Suncor's mitigation plan. This expert review is intended to ensure that Suncor's Operational Plan will guarantee the sustainability of the non-mined portion of the MLWC.

Old Fort

Belonging to the Athabasca Plains, Old Fort is a remote wilderness located within the Athabasca Plains Natural Subregion of Alberta's Boreal Forest. This landscape is defined by jack pine forests in upland sites, gravel-cored hills, and sandy plains. Located on the southern border of Athabasca Lake and east of the hamlet of Fort Chipewyan, the Old Fort's wilderness also comprises open sand dunes that are stabilized by vegetative communities such as sand heather.

AWA's Old Fort Area of Concern currently has no legislated protected areas, however, it is near the Athabasca Lake Public Land Area of Recreation and Tourism.

Peace River Valley

The Peace River Valley is one of the most diverse and productive river valleys in the Parkland and Boreal Forest regions of Canada. A nationally significant waterway that supplies water to the Peace-Athabasca Delta in Wood Buffalo National Park, the delta is one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. In Alberta, the river contains a high diversity of fish species, while the valley's south-facing slopes retain important prairie and parkland vegetation. Plant



communities of prairie grasses and cacti support butterfly and bird species that are far more northern than other populations. The valley provides important habitat for migratory birds, resident moose, elk, and deer.

AWA is part of the 'Friends of the Peace River Valley' coalition working to maintain water flows and important river corridor habitat. We work to create greater awareness of the proposals and their impacts with environmental groups and local citizens.

Primrose-Lakeland

AWA's Primrose-Lakeland Area of Concern is situated between Lac La Biche and Cold Lake in northeast Alberta, in the southern part of Alberta's large 'central mixedwood' boreal subregion. This ecologically rich area has one of the highest concentrations of lakes in the province as well as important intact older forests. It includes the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, which still has extensive areas of roadless forests and wetlands. AWA's vision for Primrose-Lakeland includes a large, connected protected area that extends from Lakeland Provincial Park-Provincial Recreation Area east to the Saskatchewan border and includes significant intact areas of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range. AWA seeks strong ecosystem-based management plans for these conservation areas and supports a central role for Indigenous leadership in land stewardship.

AWA participated in the Cold Lake caribou sub-regional Task Force; one of three multi-sector task forces the Alberta government launched in November 2019. In May 2021 we offered our comments on the draft Cold Lake sub-regional plan. AWA believes collaborative efforts are key to ensure threatened Cold Lake and Christina Lake woodland caribou populations survive and recover, and to ensure communities in these regions can also thrive. AWA seeks an enforceable land-use plan that achieves and maintains habitat conditions for naturally self-sustaining caribou. For areas outside caribou ranges, we seek management of cumulative land-use impacts to maintain ecosystem, species, and genetic diversity, to fulfill Alberta's commitment under the 1995 *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy*.

AWA supports significant Indigenous leadership and participation in caribou monitoring and habitat conservation. We strongly supported both the draft Agreement (August 2019) and finalized Agreement (December 2019) between the federal government and Cold Lake First Nations to advance caribou recovery actions.

In April 2022, the Government of Alberta released two long-awaited land-use plans for threatened woodland caribou. The plans apply to the Cold Lake sub-region in northeast Alberta, and the Bistcho Lake sub-region in northwest Alberta. AWA recognizes that these caribou range plans show a positive shift by Alberta. They set out how the combined impacts of industrial infrastructure, cut blocks, and other human access will be tracked, coordinated and reduced. These actions will eventually regain important intact, connected wetland and older forest areas that caribou require in their home ranges.

AWA participated in the development of these plans, but we are very concerned about significant gaps present in the final versions. First, there must be a much stronger commitment to a process of collaborating with Indigenous communities to support their land-use goals. Second, it is unclear when minimum caribou habitat goals are met, especially for Cold Lake. Crucial specific targets are lacking in the first 5-10 years and in subsequent decades for maintaining existing good ('biophysical') caribou habitat and reducing overall habitat disturbance. As a result, AWA believes that caribou critical habitat still lacks the effective protection required under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. It also means that Alberta's over-



reliance on drastic annual wolf culls in the Cold Lake area will continue for far too long, to enable the caribou to survive until their habitat conditions improve. Third, future wildfire disturbance appears to be ignored in each of these fire-affected sub-regions. This means the plans are unlikely to reach the minimum habitat conditions for self-sustaining caribou outlined in the federal boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy.

AWA will continue to seek stronger processes that support Indigenous land-use priorities and set firm timelines for habitat actions, as we work together to protect threatened woodland caribou in Alberta.

Wood Buffalo National Park

Wood Buffalo National Park, 80% of which is in Alberta, is Canada's largest National Park and its largest UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Peace-Athabasca Delta, which lies mostly within the Park, is one of the world's largest freshwater deltas and supports globally significant wildlife populations. In response to a Mikisew Cree First Nation petition, a UNESCO monitoring team concluded in 2017 that cumulative threats to the Delta are not being adequately managed, including threats from hydroelectric dams on the Peace River, climate change and oil sands developments along the Athabasca River. As a result, Parks Canada developed a 142-point Action Plan in early 2019 to improve Indigenous governance-sharing and to address threats to the world heritage values of the Park. AWA collaborates with Mikisew Cree First Nation and other First Nations and ENGOs to encourage federal and provincial actions to reduce threats to Wood Buffalo National Park and the Peace-Athabasca Delta.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

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

From the time of AWA's 1977 submission to the Eastern Slopes Hearings and publishing the *Eastern Slopes Wildlands* book, AWA has been dedicated to better protection of this region. Some parts of the Eastern Slopes have very little real protection, and our work is never done as political decisions change long-standing policies and protective measures with little regard for headwaters protection, vital wildlife habitat, and sustainable recreation.

Willmore Wilderness Park

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

The Willmore is dear to the heart of AWA as an example of what wilderness can and should be. Throughout the years, there have been battles over continued protection of the area and constant vigilance is required if protection is to be honoured in the future. That vigilance extends to educating civil servants who at times seem to place little value on true wilderness in



Alberta. There seems to be a perennial push for fixed-roof structures and routes, potentially increasing the degree of recreational access and impact within the park.

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

In 2017, AWA was told that there was a reasonable chance that a Willmore Wilderness Park management plan could be produced in 2018. A management plan that provides true protection of the pristine wilderness status of Willmore Wilderness Park is long overdue and a draft management plan still hasn't been made public.

Proposals to add the Willmore Wilderness Park and other areas adjacent in the Rocky Mountain Parks, to the Rocky Mountain World Heritage Site have stalled because of local opposition and there is no indication that consideration will be given to this region in the near future.

Kakwa

AWA's Kakwa Area of Concern overlaps with the most northerly portions of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta, north of the Willmore Wilderness. It includes much of the Kakwa River and Narraway River watersheds, and the upper Wapiti River. The area is home to important wildlife populations, including threatened Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway southern mountain caribou, as well as mountain goats, bighorn sheep, bull trout and Arctic grayling. It includes the major wildlife corridor of Caw Ridge. Ten percent of the area is protected by the Kakwa Wildland Provincial Park, the rest is multi-use public lands with extensive habitat fragmentation from seismic lines, forestry clearcuts and oil and gas infrastructure. AWA's vision is for formal protection of Caw Ridge, and for Kakwa lands to be restored, protected and managed for biodiversity, climate-resilient watersheds, and the exercise of Indigenous rights, with compatible economic activities supporting these outcomes.

AWA opposes development on Caw Ridge and will continue to oppose applications for coal mining, other industrial developments, and high impact motorized recreation in this sensitive area of wilderness. Coal mining in this area, as in other parts of Alberta, has gone through numerous boom and bust cycles and there have been a number of different operators. Reclamation and restoration of the area of the Grande Cache Coal mine has been problematic for many years. We continue to monitor coal mining-related activity in Kakwa, including metallurgical coal mining operations of CST Canada Coal Company in Grande Cache, which resumed in late 2021.

Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway southern mountain woodland caribou rely upon the Kakwa landscape and its connectivity to other caribou ranges in Alberta and BC. The winter ranges of these caribou are heavily fragmented by a combination of energy industry surface disturbances and forestry clearcuts. AWA believes that solutions are within reach to protect and restore vital caribou habitat while supporting economic development compatible with self-sustaining caribou.



AWA continues to be very concerned with the environmental impacts of forestry operations in Weyerhaeuser's Forest Management Area which overlaps with the Kakwa region. We believe the federal Environment Minister's 2018 findings of 'imminent threat to recovery' for the Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway caribou have not translated into Alberta forestry management decisions to prevent caribou extirpation.

In autumn 2021, AWA was concerned to learn that Forest Management Unit E10, which features steep slopes and important bighorn sheep and mountain goat habitat, was being considered for a new forestry allocation ahead of the completion of sub-regional plans. We raised concerns about this idea several times with Alberta Forestry, and we were encouraged to learn in July 2022 that there will be no allocation of E10 ahead of the completion of both Upper Smoky and Berland sub-regional plans.

An integrated land-use planning process is underway in the 'Upper Smoky' sub-region, which includes the Kakwa. AWA was a member of the Upper Smoky caribou sub-regional task force, composed of diverse rights holders and stakeholders, which forwarded its recommendations to Alberta in 2020. The provincial government has committed to finalize the Upper Smoky sub-regional plan by the end of 2022.

In early 2022, AWA commissioned distinguished journalist Gillian Steward to profile the Upper Smoky sub-region's iconic caribou, and the lands, people and industries of the area. Her writings will help Albertans to learn about the Upper Smoky and the land-use transformation that is needed for caribou recovery and an environmentally sustainable regional economy. We believe this will strengthen both the draft Upper Smoky plan for public consultation, and the ultimate plan adopted by government.

Little Smoky

The relatively wet, cool foothills forests of AWA's Little Smoky Area of Concern can serve as important climate change refugia for woodland caribou, native coldwater fish, and other forest species. Although the habitat is now highly fragmented due to intensive forestry and energy industry impacts, AWA's vision is that Little Smoky forests are restored to support thriving fish and wildlife populations, Indigenous rights, and compatible economic and recreation activities. We support significant Indigenous leadership and participation in the region's wildlife and habitat conservation.

AWA has been a member of the Berland caribou sub-regional Task Force since its launch in summer 2021. AWA believes a collaborative, consensus-based process with diverse rights holders and stakeholders will help ensure that cumulative industrial land-use impacts are reduced and optimized. AWA seeks an enforceable land-use plan that will achieve and maintain habitat conditions for naturally self-sustaining A La Peche and Little Smoky caribou, uphold Indigenous rights, support multi-species recovery and enable a transition to an environmentally sustainable regional economy. The Alberta Government committed to the federal government that it will finalize this plan in 2023.

From August to November 2021, concerned Indigenous communities, trappers, and conservation groups including AWA strongly objected to West Fraser Hinton's particularly inappropriate imminent logging plans in two of its forestry compartment areas. The proposed logging ran from Highway 40 to the Willmore Wilderness Area border, within old-growth forest habitat of threatened A La Peche caribou, on both sides of Moon Creek, which is an endangered Athabasca rainbow trout (ART) stream. AWA asked Alberta to defer logging by West Fraser



Hinton in the six percent of its forest tenure that overlaps Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou ranges, to protect caribou survival options while the Berland plan is developed. AWA also requested that Fisheries and Oceans Canada not permit the logging and associated water course crossings until it can demonstrate that cumulative habitat impacts are compatible with ART survival and recovery objectives.

The combined voices resulted in a reprieve for this area. In November 2021, the Alberta government temporarily excluded the undisturbed caribou habitat portion of West Fraser's Moon Creek proposal from being approved for harvest. In February 2022, West Fraser Hinton announced it would not consider logging in those compartments unless that is in alignment with the finalized Berland sub-regional land-use plan.

Bighorn

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



South Ram Headwaters. © Vivian Pharis

Following the provincial election in May 2019, the new provincial government confirmed it would not implement the Bighorn Country concept proposed by the former government, but would return the management planning of Bighorn to the North Saskatchewan Regional Planning process. AWA believes that the North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council recommendations fall short of the protection that is needed for the Bighorn Wildland and must include at minimum those areas promised for protection by the Alberta government since 1986 when the protected area actually showed on Alberta road maps. It has subsequently been removed.

AWA will participate in any new processes or public consultation opportunities to emphasize the importance of sound management in this region for watershed and wildlife health.

Trail Monitoring

From 2003-2017 AWA completed comprehensive visits to the Ram/Clearwater trail system which is designated for off-road vehicle use. With the use of TRAFx monitoring units and ODK data collection system AWA described damage to the trail system. Illegal use, fragmentation of this wilderness landscape, impacts on wildlife, and associated erosion and sedimentation from numerous crossings of streams by vehicles has been documented. In 2019, AWA conducted two trips to download data from TRAFx units buried at strategic points along the trail system. The TRAFx units are used to monitor and document the amount of vehicle traffic on the trails and the last data collected was at the end of the season in 2020. Findings since AWA's last cumulative report in 2012 are currently being analyzed and AWA anticipates the release of the final cumulative report in 2022. There is no doubt that the topography, soil, and vegetation of the region are not able to withstand motorized recreation.

Bighorn Historic Trail

Between 1994 and 2020, AWA has worked to open and maintain the Historic Bighorn Trail between Crescent Falls on the Bighorn River and the Wapiabi, Blackstone and Chungo Gaps. To our knowledge AWA was the only equestrian group to sign up to maintain a provincial trail when the Forester responsible for the Nordegg, Rocky Mountain House area set up the "Adopt-a-Trail" program in 1994.

When AWA adopted this trail, 10 years of cleaning backcountry campsites, most of them old outfitter camps, as well as some seismic exploration camps throughout the Bighorn region, from the Panther River in the south to the Brazeau River in the north had been completed. In the fall of 2017, for the first time in 23 years of maintenance work, the participants were assisted by helicopter dropped supplies and tools, courtesy of Alberta Environment and Parks. AWA confirmed the need to complete further planning for specific difficult segments of the trail.

For a number of reasons a trail maintenance trip was not conducted in 2018 or 2019. A trip into the Wapiabi and some of the most appealing segments of the trail was made in 2020. The continued maintenance of the Bighorn Historic Trail in coming years will depend on leadership from the government and cooperation with other interested volunteers. Volunteerism from AWA's humble beginnings in 1965 to today has included AWA's on-the-ground work, historic trail maintenance, motorized trail monitoring and researching, writing, and publishing AWA's book, *Bighorn Wildland* and participating at every opportunity possible. All these years and all these strategies have been aimed at seeing better decision making for the area.



SOUTHERN EASTERN SLOPES REGION

The Southern Eastern Slopes of Alberta stretch from the South Ghost to the United States boundary in Waterton Lakes National Park. The region is part of the Crown of the Continent which contains mountain and foothills ecosystems that are crucial for supporting biodiversity.

This narrow, forested band of public lands provides a suite of critical ecosystem services such as forming headwaters for rivers that cross southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and is internationally recognized for its varied and impressive landscapes, biodiversity, and critical wildlife movement corridors. The Southern Eastern Slopes contain the following AWA Areas of Concern (from north to south): South Ghost, Bow-Canmore Corridor, Kananaskis, the Livingstone-Porcupine, and the Castle.

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

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

Decisive actions which prioritize Albertans' health and well-being, and properly value intact and healthy landscapes are long overdue. *Eastern Slopes for Tomorrow* partners, while not engaged in a campaign, will need to continue being tireless in efforts to raise awareness and speak up for responsible land management decisions in Alberta's Eastern Slopes. The Southern Eastern Slopes region has been impacted by several legislative changes in the past year that remove important protections for parks and public lands, including Bill 21 (The *Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act*), and Bill 79 (the *Trails Act*).

South Ghost Wilderness Area - Ghost-Waiparous

Wilderness, wildlife, and water quality and quantity are essential values of the South Ghost Wilderness Area, and in the Ghost-Waiparous that forms a transition zone for the South Ghost area. Expansion of the adjacent Don Getty Wildland Park was promised in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) and has not been implemented. Among many other areas in the Eastern Slopes headwaters, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use continues to pose a threat to riparian health and landscape integrity. AWA works with Stop Ghost Clearcut and the Ghost Watershed Alliance Society (GWAS) to increase awareness of unchecked OHV activity, illegal firearms and weapons discharge, irresponsible random camping, and a lack of enforcement that has become prevalent in the Ghost-Waiparous area. GWAS continues to engage experts to conduct workshops on creating rough and loose barriers on popular river crossing sites and willow staking to stabilize and restore heavily disturbed areas. The trails themselves contribute increased sediment delivery to streams, habitat fragmentation, and stresses to wildlife; some progress with closure of water crossing areas is being made.



AWA believes ecosystem health must be prioritized above all else and recreation should be considered only where it can be accommodated sustainably. Security of our headwaters, watersheds, and natural ecosystems is vitally important for maintaining healthy communities and a healthy environment.

Bow-Canmore Corridor

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

Development proposals by Three Sisters Mountain Village (TSMV) threatened to impact connectivity within the Bow Valley's wildlife corridors, including proposals for Three Sisters Village and to develop the Smith Creek Corridor. The unexpected provincial approval of TSMV's Smith Creek Wildlife Corridor led to outcry by scientists, community groups and environmental NGOs, who asserted that the approved corridor was too narrow and steep to accommodate wildlife movement. TSMV had two Area Structural Plans (ASPs) that were rejected by Canmore Town Council. However, the Alberta Land Property Rights Tribunal overturned this municipal decision in May 2022. The Town of Canmore has filed an appeal to avoid being forced to accept this development. AWA will continue to monitor the situation and support science-based limits on development that would negatively impact wildlife corridors in the Bow Valley.

The proposed Silvertip Gondola project is another development in the Bow-Canmore corridor that has the potential to affect wildlife and contribute to cumulative disturbance in this area. Most of this project falls within the Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park. AWA provided comments to Alberta Environment and Parks regarding the Silvertip Gondola Project proposed terms of reference for environmental impact assessment. AWA's main concern with this development is that it does not align with the intent of Wildland Provincial Parks to be "large, undeveloped natural landscapes that retain their primeval character", and sets an unacceptable precedent. AWA also commented on the lack of discussion regarding cumulative impacts of this project with other developments in the Bow Valley, and the lack of consideration of climate change impacts and greenhouse gas emissions.

Kananaskis Country

Kananaskis Country is one of the better-known areas of the Southern Eastern Slopes: it has tremendous wilderness value and provides essential habitat for large mammals including cougar, grizzly bear and numerous ungulates. AWA's long-term vision for Kananaskis is that protections are expanded for critical habitat and wildlife corridors, while also providing sustainable recreation opportunities. Industrial development on public lands must be managed in a way that respects and conserves the biodiversity, wildlife corridors and headwaters of Kananaskis Country.



The public lands camping pass and Kananaskis Conservation Pass user fees were introduced in June 2021 and have now been in place for one year. AWA spoke out against the Kananaskis Conservation Pass, which reduces the availability of low-cost recreational opportunities for Albertans, and likely acts as a deterrent for visitors seeking out Alberta's wilderness. While there is a need in Kananaskis to invest into further conservation efforts, monitoring and enforcement of regulations, funding should come from within the provincial budget and not rely upon a user-pay model. Applying user fees within the Kananaskis region will likely result in shifting land use pressures to other nearby areas. The McLean Creek area, a popular off-highway vehicle destination, is exempt from this fee. OHV users have the highest impact compared to other recreationists and shouldn't be the only users exempted from the fee. AWA is also concerned about the transparency of the funds from the Kananaskis Conservation Pass, and would like to see an audited statement on spending of the funds generated from the fees. These funds should be going directly into the conservation of Kananaskis and should be above and beyond the usual spending on trail maintenance, infrastructure, and conservation initiatives that could be expected prior to the introduction of the Kananaskis Conservation Pass.

Castle Wildland Park and Castle Provincial Park

Since the September 2015 announcement of the Castle Parks, a great deal of committee work and consultation has led to the development of the Castle Management Plan, approved in 2018. AWA believes the final Castle plan reflects concerns raised in the consultation process and the wishes of Albertans to see this region protected. The plan commits to the phase-out of summer off highway vehicle (OHV) use in the parks.

In July 2019, with 132 km of trails remaining in the Castle Parks, the Government of Alberta decided to halt trail closures to reassess the suitability of OHVs within the area. AWA strongly supports upholding the commitment to phase out all trails within the Castle Parks, as the area contains critical habitat for threatened westslope cutthroat trout and grizzly bears. AWA continued to raise public awareness of this issue in 2021 and 2022 and encourage members of the public to write to the minister of Environment and Parks to express their opinion on OHV trails in the Castle. The Minister was expected to decide on how motorized recreation in the Castle Parks would be managed in the fall of 2021, however no decision has been announced to date. Recent portfolio changes within the government ministries included the appointment of a new minister for Environment and Parks. AWA has written to request a meeting; no reply has been received at the time of writing this report.

Over-grazing continues to be a concern in the Castle. In some cases, cattle have been left to graze too long, so that they decimate vegetation, including wildflowers that are valued by many visitors. Cattle that roam outside of their designated areas also threaten riparian health when they traverse streams, trampling riparian vegetation and increasing sedimentation in waterways. AWA was alerted by concerned members once again and met with Alberta Environment and Parks staff to discuss issues with fencing needing repair and cattle roaming outside of the allowed grazing areas. We are unaware of any improvements made. AWA continues to advocate for sustainable and responsible management of cattle in the Castle.

Livingstone-Porcupine Hills

AWA's goal is to ensure that the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills region is managed in a way that supports healthy watersheds and the area's unique biodiversity. Ongoing concerns for the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills include the cumulative effects of industrial land use (i.e., coal



exploration and mining, forestry, roads, oil, and gas), and high-intensity recreation within the headwaters of the Oldman River.

The Castle-Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Advisory Group (CLPH RAG) was the primary planning process for the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Public Land Use Zones (PLUZs), Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park and Black Creek Heritage Rangeland. Following the work done by the Southern Alberta Recreation Advisory Group (SARAG), the CLPH RAG sought to implement the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Management Plan and to consider recreational opportunities for the area.

A recommendations report was produced by the CLPH RAG and completed in February 2021. Given the diversity of representatives on the CLPH RAG and that it was not a consensus-based process, recommendations varied in their direction and alignment with conservation objectives. Alberta Environment and Parks planning staff and the Minister of Environment and Parks was expected to review the report and decide regarding the recommendations by fall 2021. In July 2022 we are still waiting for this decision.

Regrettably, the cumulative effects planning in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills under the Spatial Human Footprint Targets (SHF) is still not completed. Completion of the SHF and an Eastern Slopes Restoration Strategy were required within one year of the release of the LFMP (released in May 2018). The HSF is urgently needed to manage the increasing cumulative impacts of human footprint (including clearcuts and former coal mines) on the landscape.



Dutch Creek in the Oldman headwaters as captured on Sean's Epic Bikepacking Trip 2021. © Sean Nichols

PARKLAND REGION

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

Waterton Parkland

The Waterton Parkland region lies just east of Waterton Lakes National Park and represents the junction between two unique ecosystems: the Rocky Mountains and the Grasslands. The area is characterized by rough fescue grasslands and trembling aspen groves. Consisting of mostly private land, landowners in this region seek ways to minimize the impacts of development and conflicts with wildlife. AWA supports local landowners and conservationists in the region. Letters of support for landowners opposed to expanding developments and incursion into wild landscapes in the area have been written to local municipalities. In 2022, AWA wrote to oppose rezoning of the land from agricultural to rural recreational and the establishment of a youth camp.

Rumsey

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

Progress has been made to protect the Rumsey Natural Area from continuing industrial disturbance. As of February 29, 2012, all new petroleum and natural gas agreements within the Rumsey Natural Area include the provision that "Surface Access is Not Permitted." For AWA, this was an encouraging first step in the long-term phase out of oil and gas activity in the Natural Area. As of August 2019, there were 103 wells sites within the Rumsey Natural Area. The last well was drilled in August 2006 and the current statistics are: Abandoned: 10; Dry and Abandoned: 65; Gas (producing): 14; Suspended: 6; Unassigned: 4.

AWA reviewed a long-awaited confidential draft of a management plan for Rumsey in 2015 and continues to ask for the draft to be released for public consultation. There has been no explanation provided for the delay and the lack of a management plan for Rumsey. The absence of this plan could inevitably see the loss of Rumsey's remaining intact native features.

Parkland Dunes

With rolling hills of native grasses interspersed with lush aspen groves, peatlands, and vibrant wetlands, the Parkland Dunes constitute an oasis in an otherwise agriculture-dominated



landscape. Located in east-central Alberta, southeast of the Town of Wainwright, the Parkland Dunes is approximately 932 km² in size, and contains a small, protected area, the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve, which is 28 km² in size. Management of the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve is led by Alberta Parks but is also guided by the Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve Advisory Committee. AWA serves on this advisory group which didn't meet this past year. The group monitors the implementation of the 1999 management plan approved for this nationally-significant parkland sand dune and wetland wilderness. AWA hopes that this group will continue its work which has recently included discussions on approaches to reintroducing fire into this ecosystem.

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

In 2018, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP) Regional Advisory Council (RAC) Advice was finally released. AWA believes the conservation component of the Advice is inadequate and must be expanded. There are additional public lands within the area; many of these are leased for grazing purposes that could be included in the protected areas plan. AWA remains committed to the concept that the entire area needs to be conserved. This would provide a larger connected landscape for native fescue. AWA believes that the establishment of Heritage Rangelands would maintain the stewardship that current grazing leases offer while conserving these landscapes for future generations.



Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserve: Lush aspen and balsam poplar woodlands and eroding sand dunes, habitat for several rare native plant species. ©Cliff Wallis

GRASSLANDS REGION

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

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

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

Middle Sand Hills

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

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



management planning process. A news story suggesting the British Army may withdraw from training at CFB Suffield could give new opportunity for increased protection in this area and involvement of Indigenous Peoples in its future. AWA will continue to pursue the opportunity with the Department of National Defence and the Minister of the Environment.

Suffield National Wildlife Area

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

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

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

In November 2021, several media outlets reported that the British Army would be reducing their use of CFB Suffield. AWA seized on the opportunity to write to the Department of National Defence and Environment and Climate Change Canada, encouraging greater use of Suffield for conservation and reconciliation. AWA proposed Indigenous peoples could become more involved in the managing the lands, and that greater restoration of areas damaged by industrial or military use would present an economic opportunity for both Indigenous peoples and the nearby community. AWA was invited to tour the base in summer 2022, although due to intense rainfall in May-June, this tour has been postponed for August-September. We aim to use this opportunity to explore further opportunities for conservation on the base.

Milk River-Sage Creek

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

- Cypress Hills - a montane outlier with forests and lush fescue grasslands
- Pakowki Lake - an area of sandhills and a large 'playa' (meaning a flat, often dry basin) lake that is very productive for waterfowl and shorebirds in wetter years
- The balance of the area, including the Milk River Canyon and associated badlands as well as some of the most extensive native mixed grassland, silver sagebrush, and ephemeral wetland habitat in Canada.



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

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

Cypress Hills

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

In the Cypress Hills Fringe Area Structure Plan, Cypress County initially recognized the importance of preserving a buffer zone around Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park. When wind farms were proposed in the Fringe, AWA was among those who spoke out in favour of the intent of the Fringe plan, which opposes industrialization in the area. Regrettably, the proposals were approved, although AWA remains opposed to development in the Fringe Area.

AWA recently responded to the recent proposed listing of the Black Hills mountain snail as Endangered. In Canada, the Black Hills mountain snail is found only in Cypress Hills in Alberta and Saskatchewan and is highly vulnerable to environmental change. AWA hopes listing the species as Endangered will provide stronger protection to Cypress Hills.

Pakowki Lake

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

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



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

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

Milk River Ridge

This area is known for its sensitive foothills' grasslands, productive wetlands, and the only open plains habitat for grizzly bears in Alberta. Oil and gas development in the Alberta Bakken is surrounding the few remaining intact patches. The local leaseholders want protection under Heritage Rangeland designation, which AWA strongly supported during the SSRP regional planning process. The government recognized its need for protection in the SSRP and yet they continued to accept applications for new oil development in this sensitive area until the local leaseholder and AWA intervened and brought an end to it.

Late 2018 brought forward promising changes with Alberta Environment and Parks proposing to expand and re-designate the Twin River Heritage Rangeland Natural Area. The proposal included expanding the protected area by 3,173 hectares and re-designating it as a Heritage Rangeland; the Heritage Rangeland status would offer improved protection for grasslands and acknowledges grazing as an integral part of grassland ecology. While public consultation showed significant public support for the proposed changes, the expansion and re-designation never reached cabinet. This year, AWA reached out to government officials for a better understanding of the proposed redesignation, though we were told it is not a priority with the current government. AWA continues to push for a redesignation and greater protection for the area.

Milk River

In June 2020, a collapsed concrete drop structure in the Montana reaches of the Milk River reduced stream flows in Alberta to only 4.5 cubic metres per second (from an average 18 cubic metres per second at this time of year). This was a core part of the diversion system which redirected flows from the St. Mary's River to the Milk River. Since the collapse, the Milk River experienced flow levels of less than one cubic metre per second for the first time in 105 years. Repairs were completed in October and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation began diverting water to the Milk River.

Milk River Management Committee

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

The decision to form the MRMS and create a lease for the area came out of the management planning process in the 1980s. As part of its mandate, the MRMS is responsible for administering the grazing contract and long-term research monitoring, which has been ongoing since the early



1990s. This region is perhaps the longest continuously monitored grassland site in the province for native vegetation and wildlife. Renewal of the lease has been stalled in government channels and was expected before year end 2019 - we are still waiting. In a 2022 meeting and correspondence about the lease renewal, it appears that this process may be finally moving forward again.

During the last few years, the MRMS has undertaken experimental grazing on the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve (KCER) to study the effects of grazing on attempts to reduce invasive and non-native plant species. In the summer of 2017, 2,500 hectares were burned in three fires caused by lightning strikes. One started in the Pinhorn area to the west of KCER. The second started in Montana just south of KCER. Much of the KCER and the southern third of the Milk River Natural Area west and south of the Milk River canyon were burned. Repairs to fencing damaged by the fire have been completed and grazing was reintroduced following a few years of rest.

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

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

Prairie Conservation Forum

The Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) is a voluntary coalition of stakeholder groups whose members are interested in the conservation of native prairie and parkland environments in Alberta. It is a common forum to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and promote conservation of these environments.

PCF was established by the Government of Alberta in 1989 to convey support and commitment to implementing the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP). A PCAP is a five-year blueprint for conserving, protecting, and managing native prairie and parkland species, communities, and habitats. The process was initiated by the World Wildlife Fund, Canada and the provincial governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta to offer a comprehensive vision for preserving Canada's prairies. Developing and renewing the current PCAP is one of the main roles of the PCF. The PCF is currently operating under the 2021-2025 Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan.

A key outcome listed in the PCAP is to conserve connecting corridors for biodiversity. To aid in this goal, a mapping tool and centralized location for geospatial information was created to help guide land-use planners to recognize high value connectivity areas. PCF is also working on a clear definition of isolated habitats and will work on identifying isolated native prairie habitats once defined. In January 2022, a short video was released to aid in the communication of the *State of the Prairie* report, a technical summary of the extent and change in native prairie cover released in 2019. Online workshops were held in February 2022 targeting municipal governments to build awareness and communicate approaches to managing and maintaining native prairie. PCF also delivers an annual Range Stewardship Course, which returned to the field in 2022 after two years online.

PCF meetings are an important way to meet with representatives from many different interests and perspectives; Alberta's PCF has almost 50 members. Members represent agricultural



groups, conservation groups, land and resource management organizations, federal and provincial agencies, local and regional authorities and service agencies, industry, academia, and individuals. Member updates are helpful to learn about the work of different groups. Not every member has the same objectives, but everyone is at the table for a common goal – native prairie and parkland conservation.

AWA's executive director Christyann Olson was nominated to the PCF Board in 2018 for a four-year term that was renewed in 2020. In 2021, AWA staff sit on two PCF subcommittees, State of the Prairie, and Connecting Corridors. The work has concentrated on the PCAP objectives related to increasing connectivity within the prairie and parkland regions and creating and sharing extension materials on the state of Alberta's native prairie.

Grassland Restoration Forum

Grassland Restoration Forum (GRF) promotes the conservation and restoration of native grasslands in Alberta through education, outreach, and research to improve reclamation practice and foster stewardship. The forum began in 2006 as a collaboration between members of provincial agencies, the ranching community, conservation organizations, industry, plant ecologists and reclamation practitioners. AWA has been a member of the Technical Advisory Committee of the GRF in the past and attends meetings of the forum. The multi-stakeholder group is focused on best practices for restoring fescue grasslands. The GRF provides the opportunity for informed debate and discussion. The document *Minimizing Disturbance of Alberta's Native Prairie by Wind Energy Development*, developed as part of our work with the GRF, continues to be an important resource.



Where the plains meet the mountains—
the southern end of the spectacular Whaleback Ridge. ©Cliff Wallis

WATER

*"I hope that perhaps if my grandchildren or great-grandchildren are at a lake they won't be afraid to swim or drink the water."
Dr. David Schindler on what he hopes his legacy will be to future generations.*

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



A bend in the Oldman River just past the confluence with the Belly River between Fort Macleod and Lethbridge. The Oldman River forms part of the South Saskatchewan River Basin and faces numerous pressures from human land use activities. © Phillip Meintzer

AEN Water Caucus

AWA continues to chair the Alberta Environmental Network's Water Caucus, organizing its monthly calls and distributing the agenda and summary minutes for these meetings. In 2021/22, Water Caucus members continued to exchange information on various water issues across the province including irrigation expansion, the status of drought and drought resilience, coal mining and effluent release, oil sands impacts to water, the responsible tailings management alliance, and Alberta Water Council activities such as the Water for Life action plan working group.

Alberta Irrigation Modernization Program

Since autumn 2020, AWA has worked with several other environmental interests to ascertain more information regarding the largest expansion of irrigation infrastructure in Alberta's history. Formerly known as the South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB) Irrigation Expansion Project, in December 2021, AWA learned that the proponents have rebranded the project as the Alberta



Irrigation Modernization (AIM) Program. The project represents an investment of nearly \$1-billion dollars, and proposes to upgrade open irrigation canals to pipelines, as well as the construction of new and expanded reservoirs. As of November 2021, Ecojustice have been contracted to act on behalf of the nine interested parties – SAGE, AWA, CPAWS southern AB, Nature Alberta, Grassland Naturalists, Bow Valley Naturalists, Sierra Club Canada Foundation – Prairie Chapter, Arlene Kwasniak, David Swann.

In November 2021, a request for federal impact assessment by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC) was sent to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) Stephen Guilbeault and a request for provincial environmental assessment was sent to Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) Regional Manager. Our requests highlighted many of our concerns including in-stream flow needs for aquatic ecosystem health, impacts to native grasslands, altered groundwater flows, and impacts to species at risk. To date, we have learned that the Chin and Snake Lake reservoir expansion projects will require provincial environmental assessments. As a result of our letters to IAAC, the Chin, Snake Lake, and Deadhorse Coulee reservoir projects are now listed on the Impact Assessment Project Registry. Once listed, the Minister has 90-days to respond with his decision on whether these projects should be designated for an environmental impact assessment or not. We hope to see these projects designated for assessment by Minister Guilbeault.

Bow River Reservoir Options Initiative

In June 2021, AWA submitted a letter to AEP detailing our comments on the Bow River Reservoir Options Phase 2 Feasibility Study. AWA does not support the creation of new on-stream dam infrastructure as a strategy for flood mitigation for Calgary and the surrounding communities. We believe that better alternative flood mitigation strategies exist – through improving upstream land uses and limiting future commercial, industrial, agricultural, and residential developments within the ecologically vital flood plain of the Bow River. Alternative flood mitigation measures were included in our letter, and we hope our concerns will be considered as part of this process. This project is currently undergoing a “Feasibility Study” at AEP, which will not be completed until 2023, and we haven’t provided any input to the project since comments in June 2021. We will likely provide comments once the results of that feasibility study have been released in 2023.

Special Areas Water Supply Project

In the Red Deer River watershed, AWA continues to urge the Government of Alberta not to proceed with the Special Areas Water Supply Project (SAWSP). This project is neither environmentally nor financially responsible. The proposal would build a costly water pipeline to divert water from the Red Deer River and pump it 100 km eastward to benefit a small number of residents in the Special Areas. The water uses would be for livestock and to convert ecologically vital grasslands stream corridors to irrigated tame pasture. The pipeline will further reduce optimal habitat of endangered grassland species such as burrowing owl. According to the government’s commissioned socioeconomic review, the pipeline is expected to have “minimal effect on the overall economic condition in the Special Areas”; while its overall financial costs to Albertans would exceed projected regional economic benefits by hundreds of millions of dollars.

In August 2021, AWA reached out to Alberta Transportation and the Special Areas Board to inquire about the status of the project. The Special Areas Board responded by saying that after reviewing the Engineering Confirmation study and the Environment Impact Assessment, the



Special Areas Board moved not to advance further funding to the Special Areas Water Supply Project at this time. The Board decided not to submit the Environmental Impact Assessment to Alberta Environment and Parks for review.

In February 2022, AWA learned that the Special Areas Board has now partnered with the Municipal District of Acadia, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and Alberta Agriculture and Forestry to investigate the technical and financial feasibility of developing irrigation in the region. We are eagerly anticipating the eventual release of the result of this joint feasibility study to ensure that potential impacts to the environment – including aquatic ecosystems and native grasslands – have been considered in this study. AWA continues to monitor for updates on the proposed development of irrigation infrastructure in the Special Areas region of Alberta.

Wetlands

Wetlands play a crucial ecological role, moderating the intensity of floods, drought, and fires, providing wildlife habitat, and filtering water. Alberta's extensive boreal peat wetlands (peatlands) are also an important storage sink for carbon. Avoiding wetland destruction, fragmentation and desiccation is crucial to retaining these benefits. Alberta's Wetland Policy goals are to protect wetlands of the highest value, to conserve and restore wetlands in areas of high loss, to avoid and minimize negative impacts to wetlands and, where necessary, to replace lost wetland value. However, large pre-2016 industrial projects, including the oil sands industry, are almost all exempt from its requirements. The loss of high value natural wetlands in settlements and agricultural lands also remains concerning. AWA continues to work towards a clear 'no net loss' wetland policy.

Water for Life

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

AWA has been one of the Environmental Sector Board members of the multi-sector Alberta Water Council, which provides advice to the Alberta government on implementing Water for Life goals. AWA stepped down from its long-standing membership on the Alberta Water Council in October.

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) are the key regional partnerships of the Water for Life strategy. AWA is a member of most WPACs. Our staff regularly attend Bow River Basin Council quarterly and annual meetings, and our members attend events and meetings of many other WPACs. In June 2020, an AWA representative, Tjarda Barratt, was elected to the Board of the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance and she served until the spring of 2022. AWA submitted a comment letter addressing the draft *Athabasca River Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP)*, produced by the Athabasca Watershed Council (AWC) which was open for public feedback until June 30, 2021. AWA considers the IWMP to be an important strategic document that provides direction and a roadmap for future AWC-WPAC and partner activities. The recommendations we included would further strengthen this document through including more meaningful actions to protect the watershed for current and future generations.

As of July 2022, AWA are assisting our ENGO colleagues with the drafting of action items as part of the development of the next Water for Life 10-year Action Plan.



FORESTS

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

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



Grizzly Ridge Wildland Provincial Park, extensive Foothills Forest emerging with Boreal Forest below. ©Cliff Wallis

In 2021 and 2022, Alberta Forestry continued to push for increases in annual allowable cut throughout the province to increase access to timber. AWA believes that our province's forests are already over-allocated, and current forestry practices do not support valued ecosystem components like biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species-at-risk, water filtration and flow mitigation, and carbon storage. We continue to advocate for changes to forest management that would manage forests as ecosystems rather than as resources to be exploited. Healthy, well-managed forests can support timber production while still maintaining the suite of critical ecosystem services that we enjoy and rely upon. AWA has requested a meeting with the newly appointed Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Economic Development Nate Horner to discuss the future of forest management in Alberta.

In July 2021, the Government of Alberta entered into a new Forest Management Agreement (FMA) with Crowsnest Forest Products Ltd. (affiliated with Spray Lakes Sawmills) in the C5 Forest Management Unit west of Lethbridge. There was no public consultation prior to entering into this FMA. The Alberta Government news release states that the Castle Provincial Park will be

excluded from the FMA but says nothing about the Castle Wildland Provincial Park. AWA raised concerns that Alberta's forests continue to be managed on a timber-centric basis and that the privatization of forest management in the C5 area may be detrimental to ecosystem values. In May 2022, AWA sent a letter to Minister Horner regarding concerns about a request for proposals (RFP) issued by Alberta Forestry that would grant a Commercial Timber Permit in Forest Management Units W01 and W02, including a significant amount of forests northwest of Chip Lake (west-central Alberta near Wildwood and Entwistle).

AWA's main concerns with this RFP are the following:

- Destruction of important wildlife habitat
- Lack of stakeholder and public consultation
- Low stand level harvest retention requirements
- No cumulative effects assessment in the area
- Potential challenges with reforestation

Fish and Forests Initiative

In 2011, AWA's discussions with community members about how to advance inclusive and ecosystem-based forest management in the southern foothills led AWA to form the Fish and Forests Forum. For the past eleven years, AWA has facilitated the Fish and Forests Forum as a collaborative and workshop-based way to bring together experts for constructive exchanges of ideas. Various local groups, scientists, ENGOs and other members of the public concerned about issues related to forests meet quarterly each year to share information, focus efforts and prioritize actions around improving forest management and protecting forest values. In the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year, AWA hosted three forums (October 2021, January 2022, and June 2022) addressing topics that included mycorrhizal fungi in Alberta's boreal forests, destroying critical westslope cutthroat trout habitat in Silvester Creek, the Moose Lake Access Management Plan, the benefits of retention harvesting for biodiversity, and the threats and benefits of intensive forest management in Alberta forests. These forums will continue to be held virtually to be more accessible for participants who live outside of Calgary.

FSC Canada

AWA is an active member and participant in Forest Stewardship Council Canada (FSC Canada) Activities. AWA Board of Directors, Cliff Wallis, is the Chair of the Board of Directors of FSC Canada and one of two environmental chamber representatives. AWA has been supporting FSC since 2001.

In February 2022, AWA participated in the FSC audit of Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc., who hold a large tenure of 6.4 million hectares of boreal forest in northeastern Alberta. These audits are an important part of forest certification to ensure that certified organizations are meeting stringent sustainability standards. AWA continues to support FSC certification, which can contribute to better management of forests for all forest values. AWA has also worked to draw attention to other less-stringent forest certifications that greenwash consumers into believing that irresponsible forestry practices are sustainable.



ENERGY

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

Conventional Oil and Gas

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

AWA believes that responsible energy development must occur within overarching policies, targets and legislation that prioritize the protection of the ecological integrity of Alberta's wild spaces. We believe that both Alberta Energy and the Alberta Energy Regulator must begin to apply science-based cumulative effects thresholds for land disturbance and biodiversity, including for species at risk, and should assess projects considering cumulative local and sub-regional land uses.

In February 2020, AWA learned that Alberta-based Seven Generations Energy was the first Canadian natural gas producer to receive Equitable Origins' (EO) certification to the EO100 standard. Since February, AWA has engaged with Equitable Origins certifiers to support a sound application of the biodiversity provisions of their oil and gas certification, which we believe could help improve energy industry land-use practices. Since June 2020, AWA has engaged directly with Seven Generations Energy around biodiversity concerns and opportunities in its Kakwa region lease holdings.

In early April 2020, AWA voiced concerns about Alberta's March 31 decision to suspend most energy industry environmental compliance reporting requirements. AWA is unconvinced that this was a pandemic safety-related measure since all data gathering and record-keeping requirements remained. We joined First Nations and other ENGOs in raising concerns when Alberta further suspended most environmental monitoring requirements in late April and early May; this occurred at a time when other economic activities were re-opening with pandemic safety measures in place. Although reporting and monitoring resumed in July 2020, AWA remains concerned about the interruption of compliance reporting and loss of data collection without transparent justification.

AWA continues to follow the growing concerns about environmental impacts of Alberta's thousands of inactive wells. Compared to some other North American jurisdictions, Alberta has weak regulations, with inadequate financial security requirements and no required reclamation timelines. The Orphan Wells Association is working to reclaim wells throughout the province. They rely on funding from the current production of oil and the burden of orphaned wells is significant in terms of the financial resources required to reclaim them up as well as the environmental and wildlife related issues depending on reclamation. AWA continues to seek



regulatory improvements to address continuing harmful cumulative environmental impacts from energy development.

Oil Sands Monitoring

The Oil Sands Monitoring program (OSM) began in 2015 as a collaboration between the Governments of Canada and Alberta, replacing the previous Joint Canada-Alberta Oil Sands Monitoring (JOSM) program that operated for three years beginning in 2012. The OSM program was created to monitor, evaluate, and report on the environmental impacts of oil sands development in the oil sands region, to assess the risks of impacts, and improve our understanding of the state of the environment in an open and transparent manner.

AWA has been involved in the OSM program since its inception (and the transition from JOSM) through participation as the sole ENGO representative on a number of Technical Advisory Committees (known as TACs), which are accountable for designing monitoring programs to address the priorities set out by the Oversight Committee. AWA currently participates on the wetlands monitoring and terrestrial biodiversity monitoring (TBM) TACs.

Throughout 2021/22, AWA participated in the annual work planning process, where TAC members work with researchers to outline monitoring priorities for the 2022/23 program year. Work plan development occurred across August and September 2021, with funding proposals submitted in October. There were significant delays with the funding decisions as results were expected towards the end of January and weren't communicated until the end of April. This has major implications for researchers and their organizations, as important monitoring work might get delayed or entirely scrapped if it cannot be scheduled as a result of these delays.

We were disappointed that the TBM TAC only received 63% of its requested funding, with wetlands monitoring receiving only 74% of the funds they requested as well. We are encouraged that many of the geospatial components which were cut in the previous year will receive funding in this cycle, however there are serious concerns about whether the Data and Analytics TAC has the capacity and/or authority to coordinate this important work across all TACs. The geospatial components are crucial to understanding the cumulative impacts of oil sands development across the region.

AWA and our colleagues from the Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) submitted letters to the Assistant Deputy Ministers (ADMs) of the OSM program with Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Our letters outlined our ongoing concerns with the OSM program including, but not limited to:

- The static \$50-million funding cap for the OSM program
- Consistent underfunding of key monitoring programs (i.e., wetlands, TBM, and geospatial)
- Continued delays with the release of the State of the Environment (SOE) Report(s)
- The lack of ENGO participation or visibility in the development of the SOE Report(s); and
- Recent and unexpected departures of key personnel at various levels within the OSM program over the past six months.

Renewable Energy

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



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

Renewable energy projects must proceed in ways that do not create damaging new disturbances. AWA continues to oppose any renewable energy project, including transmission lines and other infrastructure, on important habitats, native grasslands, and key biodiversity areas. AWA also urges renewable energy developers to consider previously disturbed brownfield locations as the sites for their projects. In AWA's view, these considerations are not given enough weight in the provincial regulatory process. In part this is since AWA, as a provincial conservation organization, is seldom given standing to intervene when energy developers apply to the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC). The AUC regulatory process should be a process that is more hospitable to public interest arguments.

The current provincial government informed the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO), that it would not be continuing the previous government's Renewable Electricity Program (REP). While the government will not support renewable energy subsidies, they have promised to honour the existing contracts reached through the REP program. It also welcomes "market-driven" renewables that can compete with other forms of power production.

In 2021, AWA learned of a potential solar energy development near Frank Lake, within the boundaries of an IBA. AWA opposes the development for its location on an important migratory bird route and where the solar panels may contribute to high bird mortality. The Wildlife Directive for Alberta Solar Energy Projects states under Best Management Practices that a solar project should not occur within 1000m of a wetland-based Important Bird Area, and the environmental assessment has returned an overall risk to birds of high. AWA was contacted by the Blackie community and local landowners opposing the development and connected the landowners to legal representation. In June 2022, Foothills Solar GP Inc registered the case with AUC. Several members of the community have petitioned against the development and registered as intervenors in the case, and CWS has also written to express their concerns. A Notice of Hearing was announced July 26, 2022.

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



AWA continues to monitor new renewable energy projects and encourage development away from vulnerable locations, as well as supporting buffer zones for wind and solar farms.

Coal

On September 16, 2021, AWA, in collaboration with the Coal Policy Working Group, hosted the fifth in our ongoing series of Town Hall evenings. Participants Nigel Bankes (Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Law, University of Calgary), Bruce Masterman (Outdoors writer and Councillor for the Town of High River), Laura Myers (Administrator/Moderator, Protect Alberta's Rockies, and Headwater Facebook Group), and Adam North Peigan (Chairman of the Mountain Child Valley Society) discussed recent developments in coal and the future of coal in Alberta.

Coal-fired Electricity

The Climate Leadership Plan, introduced in 2015, aims to phase out coal-fired electricity by 2030. The plan stated that Alberta will increase the percentage of electricity supplied from renewable energy sources to 30 percent by 2030; it would do this by replacing up to two thirds of the retiring coal capacity with renewable energy. One third of that coal capacity would be replaced with natural gas. This was anticipated to be an enormous task since Statistics Canada reported that, in 2014, 56 percent of the electricity generated in Alberta came from coal. However, the Parkland Institute estimates that, by the end of 2023, the province will have little coal-fired electricity left. In 2021, only 20 percent of Alberta's electricity was generated by coal, putting Alberta well on the path for a complete phase out by 2030. The coal phase-out, arguably the most climate-friendly component of the former government's climate plan, was made palatable to coal-fired electricity producers through a \$1.36 billion compensation agreement. AWA, in the names of the climate, health, and wilderness, unconditionally supports the complete phase-out of coal-fired electricity production.

ECCC Proposed Coal Mining Effluent Release Regulations

In January 2022, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) released a Discussion Document outlining their proposed approach for Coal Mining Effluent Release Regulations scheduled for implementation in 2023 under the *Fisheries Act*. ECCC is proposing to allow for the release of coal mining effluent into rivers and streams so long as it has been treated to meet specified limits for deleterious substances. AWA participated in an online information session hosted by ECCC on February 16 and submitted a letter outlining our concerns with the proposed regulations. The key points from our letter include the following: 1) ECCC should continue to prohibit the deposit of coal mining effluent indefinitely until Industry can ensure water quality is equal to or greater than in the receiving watershed; 2) Limits and thresholds need to be science-based and ensure the protection of water quality and ecosystem health – not based on what is practical or feasible for Industry; 3) Revised limits and thresholds need to apply to all mines, including those currently operating or currently under development; and 4) ECCC needs to consider both the downstream and cumulative effects of these Proposed Regulations as opposed to solely focusing on end-of-pipe concentrations of deleterious substances as currently proposed.

Montem Tent Mountain

Montem Resources acquired the historic Tent Mountain mine in 2016, which closed operations in 1983, with ambitions to re-develop the open-pit metallurgical coal mine. Several First Nations and ENGOs, including AWA, requested that the project undergo federal impact assessment due to probable adverse environmental effects and impacts to Treaty rights. Federal Minister Wilkinson designated the project for federal impact assessment on June 28th, 2021. Montem submitted its initial project description to the federal Impact Assessment Agency (IAAC) on November 25th, 2021. On December 16th, 2021, AWA submitted comments on Montem's initial project description.



Montem Resources applied for up to \$5 million from the federal Clean Fuels Fund to finance a feasibility study into the Tent Mountain Renewable Energy Complex. AWA believes that to be considered at all for federal assistance, Montem must commit to get out of the coal mining business. It must surrender all its coal mining leases in southern Alberta and withdraw the Tent Mine Redevelopment Project from the federal impact assessment process. AWA sent a letter to Minister Wilkinson opposing any federal assistance for this project and encouraged members to do the same. In March 2022, Montem signed a memorandum of understanding with Invest Alberta to establish the Tent Mountain Renewable Energy Complex. In July 2022, Montem signed an agreement with the Piikani Nation for the renewable energy complex, which lies within the traditional territory of the Piikani Nation.

Vista Coal Mine Phase II

In May 2019 the westward expansion of an open pit surface mine, Phase II of the Vista Coal Mine by Coalspur Mine Ltd, was announced. The mine is located near Hinton and the expansion would increase annual production from 10 to 15 million clean tonnes per year. AWA wrote to the AER and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change requesting that the approval of the expansion be reconsidered, and that the project be designated for an environmental assessment under section 14(2) of the Canadian *Environmental Assessment Act*, 2012.

McPherson Creek, adjacent to the proposed expansion, provides an essential wildlife corridor, numerous wetlands critical to wildlife habitat, and is home to vital populations of endangered and threatened Athabasca Rainbow Trout and Bull Trout. McPherson Creek also provides traditional ecological knowledge value for local Indigenous people including Alexis Nakota Sioux, Samson Cree, Whitefish Lake, and Ermineskin Cree First Nations. On August 28, 2019, the *Impact Assessment Act* (IAA) came into force, replacing the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, 2012 (CEAA 2012).

In December 2019, Minister Wilkinson accepted the analysis of the Impact Assessment Agency that the Vista expansion did not require an Impact Assessment under the IAA. This decision came despite the anticipated significant and irreversible impacts to local fisheries and endangered Athabasca rainbow trout habitat near the Vista mine. In early July 2020, AWA once again wrote Minister Wilkinson. With Ecojustice and other NGO partners, AWA requested that he revisit his 2019 decision and exercise his discretionary powers to reverse his earlier decision and designate the Vista expansion for an Impact Assessment. This second request came with considerable urgency given that the Government of Alberta had repealed Alberta's Coal Policy on June 1, 2020. This surprise decision from the Alberta government effectively removed a valuable zoning framework that offered some protection for important regions within the Eastern Slopes from coal mining activities. On July 31, 2020, the Minister reversed his 2019 decision and would require a federal Impact Assessment for Coalspur's Vista Mine. However, the Proponent and Ermineskin Cree Nation filed judicial review applications in Federal Court challenging the decision to require a federal Impact Assessment, which were granted on July 19, 2021. A reconsideration process to determine whether federal Impact Assessment would be required commenced in August 2021. Minister Wilkinson reinstated the decision to require Vista coal mine expansion to require federal Impact Assessment in September 2021.

Obed Mine Spill - *Monitoring the Effort to Restore Athabasca Rainbow Trout to Apetowun Creek*

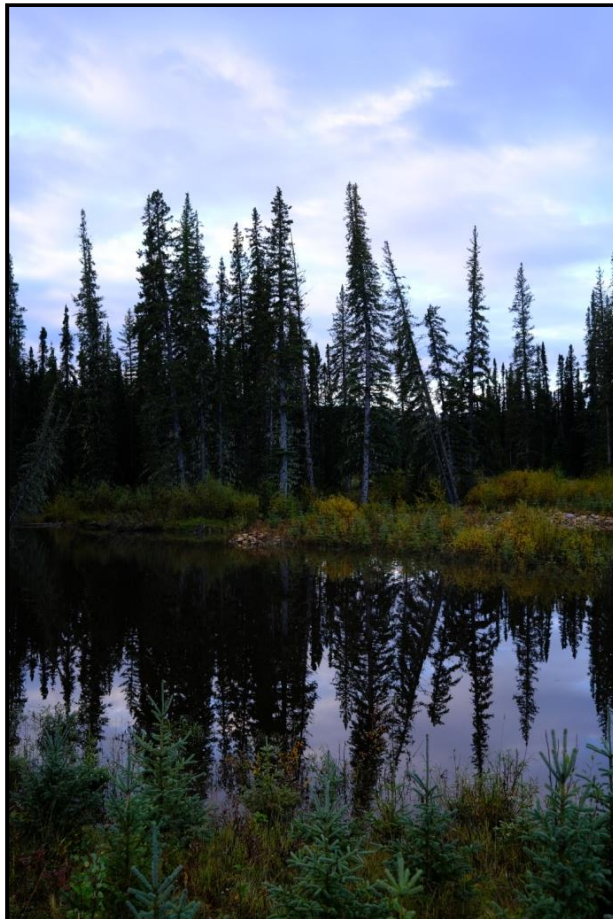
In 2013 the Obed Mountain coal mine experienced a catastrophic failure. An estimated 670 million litres of toxic water overflowed from a tailings pond at the mine site, east of Hinton. The water roared down Apetowun Creek, destroying both aquatic and riparian habitats in the upper reaches of the creek. Prairie Mines and Royalty, wholly owned by the U.S. coal miner



Westmoreland, pled guilty in June 2017 to violating both the federal *Fisheries Act* and Alberta's *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*. The company was fined \$4,425,000.

Further to this incident, Chief Ron Kreutzer on behalf of the Fort McMurray First Nation No. 468 launched a class action with legal representation from Docken LLP against the offending corporation. As part of the settlement agreement in that case, AWA received funding to monitor the company's efforts to restore the Athabasca Rainbow Trout population into Apetowun Creek. Hatfield Consultants is responsible for the restoration work in Apetowun Creek.

In the first half of 2020, AWA contacted the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Westmoreland Mining, and Hatfield Consultants and arranged to view the restoration work. In July 2020, AWA staff visited the Obed mine site and Apetowun Creek. During that visit they toured the mine site, observed the progress of rebuilding the mid-section of Apetowun Creek, and observed electro-fishing of the creek. Caudal fin clips from the Athabasca Rainbow Trout caught in that operation were to be tested genetically; the fish were released into natural holding areas in the lower section of the creek. In 2021, AWA visited, and reviewed progress made. Fish that are confirmed as pure-strain Athabasca Rainbow trout were re-located to upper-Apetowun Creek. A fish passage barrier is in place to prevent those fish from migrating to the lower sections of the creek where they could mix with non-pure strain trout. AWA will continue to monitor the progress being made on the restoration for years to come and will look for results that show these fish are thriving.



A section of Apetowun Creek near the site of the 2013 Obed Mountain coal mine spill near Hinton Alberta. © Phillip Meintzer

Grassy Mountain Coal Mine Project

The rejection of the Grassy Mountain Coal Project by the Joint Review Panel in June 2021 was a significant highlight on this file that AWA has been working on since 2014. Benga Mining Limited proposed to develop and operate an open-pit metallurgical coal mine just north of Blairmore in the Crowsnest Pass. This mine would have sprawled over nearly 1,600 hectares (nearly 16 square kilometres). It had an expected life of 25 years with a production capacity of 4.5 million tonnes a year. AWA has followed this proposed project since 2014 with a view to ensuring that Grassy Mountain never receive regulatory approval.

At the end of October 2020, a federal-provincial review panel opened a public hearing into the Grassy Mountain Project. AWA participated in this hearing in coalition with the Grassy Mountain Group, a group of local landowners that opposed the project.

Richard Secord and Ifeoma Okoye, from the law firm Ackroyd LLP, represented AWA and the Grassy Mountain Group in this hearing. Our coalition offered expert reports on:

- Land use, Access, and Residential Impacts
- Property devaluation
- Water impacts, including ground water and surface water impacts, inflow needs assessment and water chemistry, impacts on aquatic resources including Westslope Cutthroat Trout, and climate change
- Wildlife, biodiversity, and habitats impact assessment
- Noise and air pollution impacts
- Socio-economic effects

In June 2021 the Review Panel released its report on the project. As hearing commissioners of the Alberta Energy Regulator (in other words, as provincial decision makers) the panel rejected all Benga Mining's mine applications.

The Panel wrote:

"In our capacity as a panel of AER hearing commissioners, 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."

One month after this rejection, Benga Mining along with the Piikani and Stoney Nakoda First Nations applied to the Alberta Court of Appeal for permission to appeal the Panel's decision. All requests for permission to appeal this rejection were denied by Justice Bernadette Ho of the Alberta Court of Appeal on January 28th, 2022. Justice Ho's decision clearly and strongly endorses the fairness, thoroughness, and inclusiveness of the Grassy Mountain Joint Review Panel process.

By refusing to grant the necessary provincial approvals under the *Coal Conservation Act* and other provincial laws there was no need for the federal government to take any action. Nonetheless, federal Environment and Climate Change Minister Jonathan Wilkinson announced that, considering the Panel's report, he would not recommend the project's approval.



Other Coal Policy Developments

Coal mining has been an important issue for decades due to its impacts on water quality and fish, climate change, and the huge anthropogenic footprint associated with coal exploration and open-pit mining.

Following the rescission of the 1976 Coal Policy in June 2020 and its reinstatement in February 2021, the Coal Policy Committee (CPC) worked throughout 2021 to develop recommendations on the future of coal mining in the province. The CPC submitted an engagement report and a recommendations report to the Alberta's Energy Minister Sonya Savage on December 29, 2022. In the engagement report, the CPC details what it heard from 67 engagement sessions, more than 170 detailed written submissions, and more than 1,000 email submissions. AWA requested that this report be released to the public immediately. The CPC's two reports were released to the public in March 2022, along with the Alberta government's decision to temporarily halt all new coal exploration and development in the Eastern Slopes region, which was based on a recommendation in the CPC report.

While this decision was a step in the right direction, AWA continues to advocate for a total ban on coal mining in the Eastern Slopes region, which is an environmentally sensitive area that forms important headwaters and wildlife habitat. This ban needs to be enshrined in legislation through science-based regional and sub-regional planning. Currently, the halt on new coal mining and exploration is realized through a ministerial order, and as such is subject to change. At the federal level, AWA urged Minister Wilkinson to designate the Tent Mountain Mine Redevelopment Project for a federal impact assessment. He did that at the end of June 2021. The Minister also announced that all new metallurgical coal mining projects would be subject to an impact assessment under Canada's *Impact Assessment Act*.

Throughout the year AWA hosted coal Town Halls to create better awareness and mobilize Albertans about the many costs, and few benefits, that coal mining would bring to Alberta.



WILDLIFE

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

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

Species at Risk

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

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

AWA monitors and provides input on the recovery processes for species at risk, including proposed additions or changes to the species listed under SARA. When the opportunity arises, AWA comments on SARA documents open for public consultation, including recovery strategies. This year, AWA responded to the proposed listing of short-eared owl, red knot *rufa*, lesser yellowlegs, Canada warbler, barn swallow and black hills mountain snail. We opposed the proposed downgrading of ferruginous hawk to Special Concern.

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

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





Long-billed Curlew, an endemic grassland species of Special Concern in Canada. © Cliff Wallis

Bank Swallow Recovery Strategy

In 2017, the bank swallow (*Riparia riparia*) was listed as threatened under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*. SARA requires that federal ministers prepare a recovery strategy for any species listed as extirpated, endangered, or threatened. Bank swallow populations in Canada have declined by 98% over the last 40 years, and there is great urgency to act as soon as possible to halt the decline and begin efforts to recover this imperiled species.

In August 2021, AWA submitted a letter to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) outlining our comments on the Proposed Recovery Strategy for the bank swallow in Canada. The final Recovery Strategy was released by ECCC in April 2022. AWA reviewed the document to ascertain whether our feedback had been incorporated into the final version. Although some of our recommendations made it into the final Recovery Strategy, many remain unincorporated, resulting in weaker protections for bank swallow than we had hoped for. AWA submitted a follow-up letter to ECCC in May 2021 highlighting these omissions.

The Strategy states that the main threat to bank swallows is the decline in insect prey, and that pesticide use by agriculture is likely playing a role. But it lacks any recommendations on restricting or banning pesticide use near bank swallow habitat. It states that man-made erosion control measures for flood mitigation have destroyed important shoreline habitat, and that restoration is necessary to reopen these bank faces for nesting. AWA suggested an alternative flood mitigation approach, by limiting logging near bank swallow habitat to reduce the risk of erosion and eliminate the need for man-made infrastructure. Our suggestion was not incorporated into the final version. AWA believes that the population objectives of the Recovery Strategy are unacceptable. They allow for further declines (up to 20%) between 2021-2033. This does not represent a genuine recovery by any measure. We feel that the inclusion of this population objective only serves to let the Government of Canada and ECCC off the hook if

population declines continue until 2033. Action needs to be taken now to halt their decline and begin recovery.

One key positive in this Recovery Strategy is the inclusion of the Rosebud as Critical Habitat for bank swallows. We hope that this will help to prevent the proposed development of the Badlands Motorsports Resort in that area, and we appreciate this inclusion by ECCC.

Grizzly Bears

Since the designation of the grizzly bear as a provincially Threatened species in June 2010, AWA has worked to ensure that this status leads to on-the-ground improvements to known grizzly habitat; government and industrial support and action to reduce human use of access. The province's 2008 Recovery Plan for grizzly bears was clear; it stated, "human use of access is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." The updated 2020 recovery plan removed limits on the density of linear disturbance (including roads, trails, and seismic lines) that should be allowed in Grizzly habitat, which were included in the 2008 plan and based on scientific research. Instead, the 2020 recovery plan only places limits on active open roads. This was done despite concerns over this change that were raised in the review period following the release of the 2016 draft plan. The concerns are that all linear disturbance is likely to affect Grizzly Bear behaviour and survival, not only active roads.

Although estimates of Grizzly Bear populations have only been completed in some Bear Management Areas, the Minister of Environment and Parks insists that the population in the province is "thriving." This language is premature and raises concerns that the Government of Alberta may push to restart the grizzly bear hunt, which was stopped in 2006. Human-bear conflict continues to be the highest cause of Grizzly Bear mortality in the province. When the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan was written in 2008, it was estimated that there were fewer than 700 grizzlies remaining in the province. From 2008 to 2018, a total of 227 Grizzly Bear deaths were documented. Of those deaths, 208 of them were known to be human caused.

In addition to being important for ecological health, Grizzly Bears are a flagship species that allow us to regulate how the land is used for the betterment of the total environment. These large carnivores are culturally and spiritually important to many Albertans and Indigenous peoples, and therefore there is a lot of public support behind protecting them. To protect Grizzly Bears, we must limit the amount of human development and motorized access within Grizzly habitat, which benefits other wildlife species and the ecosystem. AWA continues to raise awareness for protection of Grizzly Bears and their habitat.

Black Bears

The only black bear population estimate in Alberta was conducted in 1993 and estimated 40,000 black bears in the province. Black bear management continues to operate based on this estimate, despite significant increases in disturbance and land-use changes that may have altered the population significantly. More transparent and scientific data is required to understand population numbers and track mortality and incidences of human-bear conflicts.

In the spring of 2018, the Alberta Government announced that the rehabilitation of orphaned black bear cubs would be permitted. Significant pressure from the community made a difference with decision makers. AWA welcomed this announcement and encouraged this measure to be expanded to other species, including threatened grizzly bears. Regrettably,



rehabilitation efforts for other wildlife including bighorn sheep, mountain goats, wolves, coyotes, black bear adults, and cougars continues to be prohibited.

With human-related mortalities on the rise for this species, AWA continues to advocate for a more thorough assessment of population numbers, the rehabilitation of orphaned black bear cubs, continual funding for the Alberta BearSmart programs, and implementing more specific measures for reducing bear attractants. AWA believes that the hunting practice of bear baiting is unethical, and advocates for its immediate end. Mandatory reporting of unlicensed harvest on private land must be instituted.

Caribou

Woodland caribou are perfectly adapted to Alberta's boreal, foothills and mountain regions. They are important to Indigenous peoples and are an 'indicator' species of the intactness of their home ranges. Their survival is threatened by cumulative industrial impacts that fragment the older forests and wetlands they rely upon to avoid encounters with predators. AWA's vision is for naturally self-sustaining, connected populations of woodland caribou. We manage and maintain a separate website on caribou at www.Caribou4Ever.ca to help provide better awareness of Alberta's caribou and solutions for their recovery.

We are making significant efforts to ensure Alberta delivers on the caribou conservation agreement it signed with the federal government in October 2020 to avoid a federal habitat protection order. Alberta missed 2017 deadlines outlined in the 2012 federal recovery strategy to deliver range plans that protect critical habitat. In the 2020 federal conservation agreement, Alberta has committed that by 2025 it will finalize enforceable caribou land-use plans in all its caribou ranges to achieve and maintain adequate habitat conditions over the coming decades that can support self-sustaining caribou populations.

In April 2022, the Alberta government released its first two long awaited final caribou sub-regional land-use plans. These apply to the northeast 'Cold Lake' and northwest 'Bistcho Lake' sub-regions. AWA believes these first plans show a major positive shift to a promising cross-ministry land-use system to manage cumulative land-use impacts; however, the plans require stronger 'decade 1' actions to support Indigenous rights and habitat protection and recovery measures that are urgently needed. We also called for a much stronger commitment to a process of collaborating with Indigenous communities to support their land-use goals when Alberta implements these plans.

AWA continues to engage with Environment and Climate Change Canada on Alberta's progress and remaining sizeable gaps in caribou habitat management. We have called for Canada's Environment and Climate Change Minister to promptly convey his opinion to Canadians about the extent to which Alberta is effectively protecting caribou critical habitat with these first two range plans. We also continue to engage with Alberta Environment and Park to strengthen caribou land-use planning and implementation and ensure their transparent, timely reporting of current caribou habitat conditions.

With that in mind, AWA is participating in the second round of Alberta government multi-sector task forces, which started in summer 2021. These MLA-chaired task forces consist of diverse rights holders and stakeholders who provide recommendations to the province for drafting its sub-regional caribou land-use plans. AWA participated in Cold Lake, Bistcho Lake, and Upper Smoky task forces, which submitted their recommendations in 2020.



Task forces are now underway for these sub-regions delineated by the Alberta government:

- ‘Wandering River’ in northeast Alberta, including the East Side of Athabasca caribou ranges south of Fort McMurray
- ‘Berland’ in west central Alberta, including Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou ranges south of the Grande Cache area and
- ‘Chinchaga’ in northwest Alberta, including the Chinchaga caribou range west of Manning

Task force recommendations are published at the same time as Alberta’s draft sub-regional plans for these areas are released for public consultation. Final plans are due in 2022 for Wandering River, 2023 for Berland and Chinchaga. (See also Bistcho, Primrose-Lakeland, Kakwa and Little Smoky Areas of Concern and Lower Athabasca Region).

The land-use plan for west central Alberta’s Upper Smoky is due to be finalized by the end of 2022. In early 2022, AWA commissioned distinguished journalist Gillian Steward to profile the Upper Smoky sub-region’s iconic caribou as well as the lands, people, and industries of the area. Her writings will help Albertans to learn about the Upper Smoky and the land-use transformation that is needed for caribou to recover and for an environmentally sustainable regional economy. We believe this will strengthen both the draft Upper Smoky plan to be presented later in 2022 for public comment, and the ultimate plan adopted by government. Her compelling writings will be on the www.Caribou4Ever.ca website.

We continued our engagement with Jasper National Park and other federal decision makers this year to improve the survival chances of Jasper’s critically low caribou populations. At the urging of AWA and other conservation groups, in October 2021 Parks Canada at last removed recreation access into the Tonquin and Brazeau range backcountry for the entire snow season. We welcomed that decision. In May-June 2022, Jasper released a caribou conservation breeding proposal for public comment. It proposes to capture, breed and release mountain caribou over 20 years to re-populate the Tonquin, Maligne and Brazeau caribou ranges. AWA has reluctantly concluded that the program is a tragic but necessary interim measure to keep wild caribou in Jasper National Park, where they belong. But an ethical approach must be taken to re-populate these caribou ranges, by improving the survival chances of as many remaining wild caribou as possible. To that end, AWA will continue to urge Jasper to expand its outreach to visitors and residents on caribou needs and continue to reduce recreation access impacts and improve habitat connectivity in Jasper’s caribou ranges.

This year AWA again spotlighted important First Nations land-use stewardship goals and approaches relevant to caribou range management. With the release of Alberta’s Bistcho Lake sub-regional plan, we continued to seek an Alberta process to advance the concept of a Bistcho Lake area Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) led by the Dene Tha’ First Nation, within the Bistcho caribou range.

In November 2021, we were honoured to co-present with a representative of the Fort McKay First Nation a webinar for Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute’s caribou recovery series. We described the landmark February 2021 Moose Lake Access Management Plan, which includes enforceable limits to habitat disturbance in support of biodiversity and Indigenous rights. The Plan applies to a ten-kilometre zone around the Nation’s Moose Lake reserves, a zone that overlaps the Red Earth caribou range.



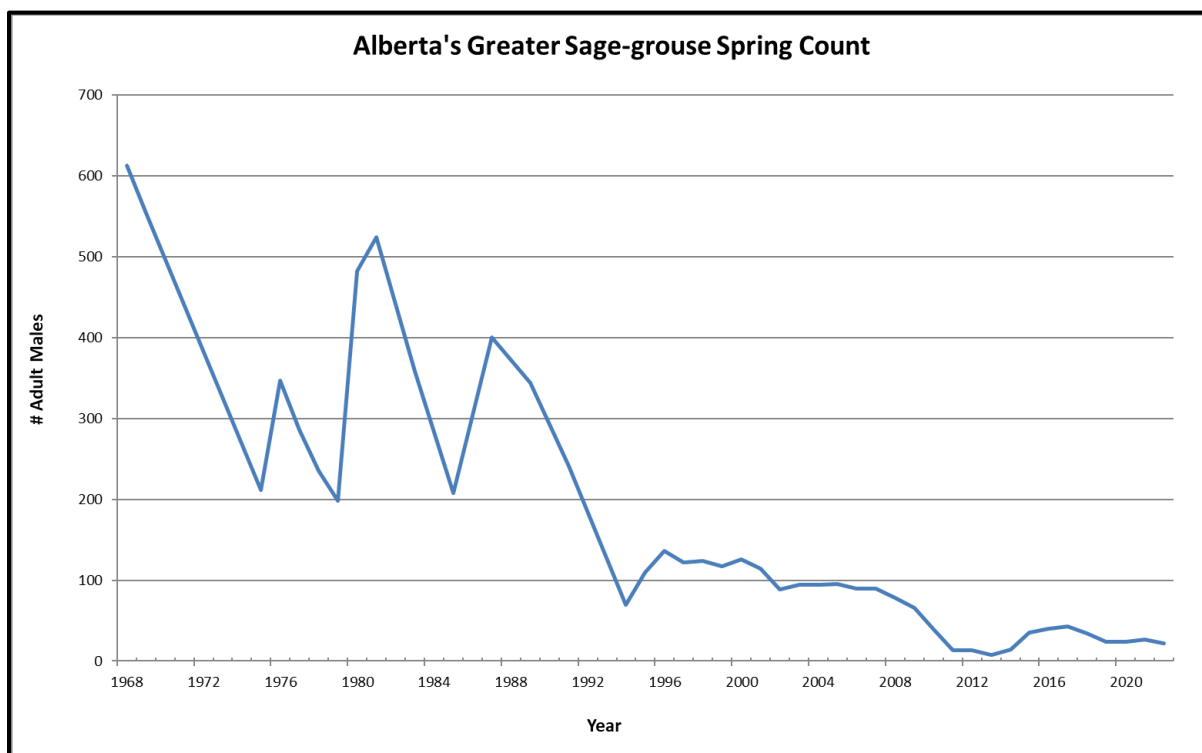
We also profiled the Tâdzîé/Atihk Stewardship Plan developed by Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) and Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN) for four northeast Alberta boreal woodland caribou ranges. The Plan's foundation is Indigenous knowledge, laws, and stewardship principles, including that ACFN and MCFN Treaty rights must be included in caribou recovery actions. It is far superior to Alberta's own first two caribou range plans in terms of a clear land zonation approach and the timelines it sets for caribou habitat recovery actions. AWA has encouraged Albertans to champion this Stewardship Plan.

Greater Sage-grouse

Greater sage-grouse are one of many federally- and provincially-listed species in Alberta's grasslands. The long-term future of our grasslands, and the many species that rely on them, depends on the stewardship of many, not the least of which is the stewardship landowners and leaseholders practice. In 2013, only 8 males were counted in Alberta, a massive decline from the 613 in 1968, and lower than the 136 counted in 1996. It seemed inevitable that greater sage-grouse would soon be extirpated from Canada.

In 2013 AWA, the Wilderness Committee, Nature Saskatchewan, and Grasslands Naturalists - represented by Ecojustice lawyers – successfully challenged the federal government to step up protections for the sage-grouse, resulting in an Emergency Protection Order. Since implementation of the protection order, there has been an overall increase in populations, with 14 males counted in 2014, and 35 males in 2015. In 2016, the entire Canadian population was estimated at 340 birds, including 38 females imported from Montana.

Disappointingly, Alberta's 2022 lek survey only counted 22 males (down from 27 in 2021).



Oil and gas and habitat degradation remains the largest threat to greater sage-grouse, and the reclamation and remediation of orphaned wells and abandoned structures is likely to benefit sage-grouse. However, AWA has been concerned with the helium activity in the area, which will impact sage-grouse similarly to oil and gas, and with renewable energy developments that infringe on native grasslands. In 2022, AWA spoke to several key players involved in sage-grouse conservation, including the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo, Alberta Environment and Parks and Cows and Fish, and published articles on greater sage-grouse conservation and the threat of helium.

Wolves

As top predators, wolves play a vital role in keeping wild ecosystems healthy. AWA's goal is for the Alberta government to take responsibility for managing Alberta's wolves in a science-based, responsible, and transparent manner. Measured, effective, and humane approaches to wolf management are key.

The focus of our 2021-22 wolf work was woodland caribou management. Habitat fragmentation of caribou ranges from the combined impacts of seismic lines, clearcuts, roads and industrial infrastructure has robbed caribou of their ability to avoid overlap with wolves. Seven of Alberta's 15 caribou populations on provincial lands are now propped up by an annual wolf cull in their ranges. AWA believes it is highly unethical for Alberta to rely on wolf culls to stabilize caribou populations while continuing to allow caribou habitat to further deteriorate.

We are making significant efforts to ensure Alberta delivers on its commitment to finalize enforceable caribou land-use plans by 2025 that, over the coming decades, will achieve and maintain adequate habitat conditions to support naturally self-sustaining caribou populations.

Game Farming

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

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

Just a year ago in 2021, AWA reported that CWD in wild Cervid populations occurred in 27 US states and 2 Canadian provinces. Now the US National Health Centre reports as of April 2022, that CWD is in 30 US states and 4 Canadian provinces. CWD continues on game farms in 18 states and 3 provinces, including Alberta.



Fortunately, public awareness of the potential public health crisis is growing. In December of 2018, the Dene Nation raised, concerns of the potential impacts that CWD would have if spread to remaining caribou populations. Over 30 stakeholders and experts wrote to the federal government in the summer, warning of potential trade embargoes and health risks if the government fails to contain the disease, which received widespread media attention. The National Fishing and Hunting Collaborative (representing fish and game organizations across the country) urged the federal and provincial governments to act and meaningfully tackle the problem.

2021-2022 Alberta Government findings indicate the steady march of CWD towards the west in the province. As of the last analysis of hunter-returned deer heads, CWD is shown to have reached the foothills region in the south of the province and looks like it will reach the central foothills next. The statement below is part of this year's government report, and it appears rather incredible that pride seems to be taken for good surveillance as the disease marches steadily onwards, with no mention of any success at curtailment, much less eradication, or even of new attempts at curtailment.

"It is hard to believe we have been tracking this disease in wild deer in Alberta for over 20 years. Alberta began CWD hunter surveillance in 1998 and has one of the best continuous datasets documenting the occurrence and patterns of CWD in wild cervids, specifically in prairie/ parkland ecosystems."

The following sets of data indicate how rapidly and relentlessly CWD is increasing in the wild, especially in Mule Deer. Government reported figures show that:

In 2015 CWD occurred in

- 3.8% of tested mule deer
- 0.8% of tested white-tailed deer
- 0% of tested elk/moose

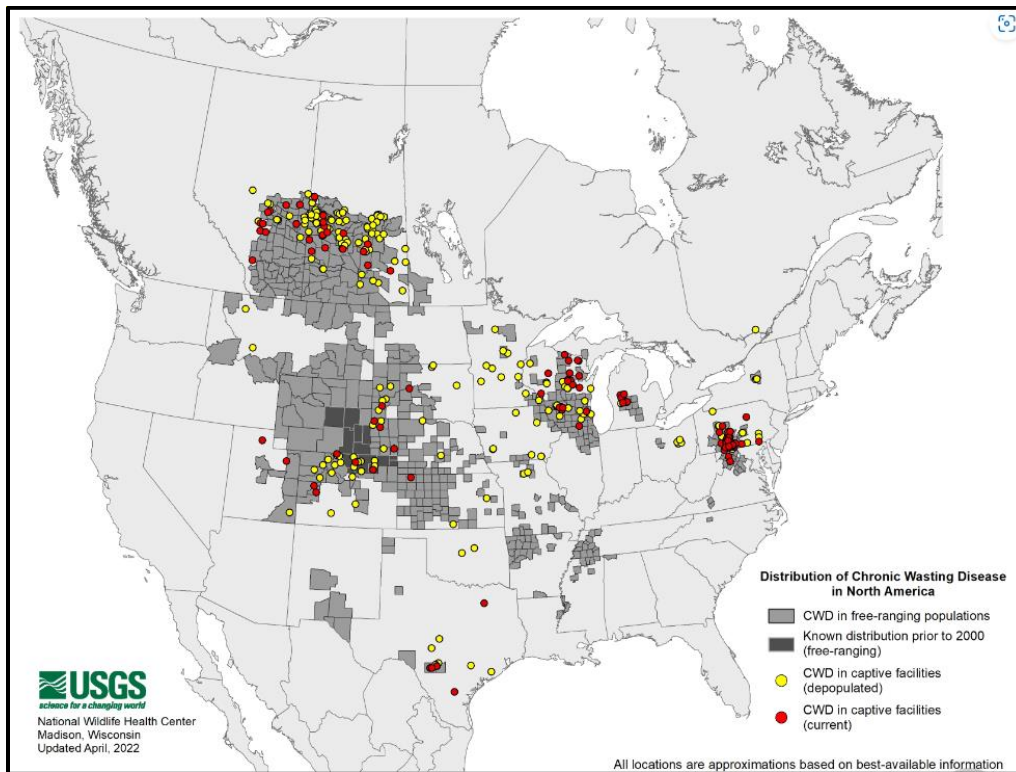
In 2018 CWD occurred in

- 12% of tested mule deer
- 2.3% of tested white-tailed deer
- 0.8% of tested Elk
- 0% of tested Moose

In 2022 CWD occurred in

- 14.4% of tested mule deer
- 4.4% of tested white-tailed deer
- 2.4% of tested elk (Suffield)
- 0% of moose





Distribution of Chronic Wasting Disease in North America by National Wildlife Health Centre April 1, 2022

Recently-published findings from the Department of Veterinary Pathology, WCVN, Saskatoon, by researcher Trent Bollinger and his large team, took a comprehensive look at CWD in wild cervids. It shows Alberta with no current farm outbreaks, and 10 farms that have been closed and destocked due to CWD. Saskatchewan shows one current farm outbreak and at least 50 closed farms. The research also shows the impact of CWD on declining wild herd populations. In examining what are effective control mechanisms, it appears that managing “alternative food sources” would probably achieve the most effect but would take a considerably coordinated province-wide approach, perhaps unachievable. Alternative food sources include hay and grain stored on the ground and even bales set out for erosion control, along with salt block sites. Congregation is a primary way CWD spreads amongst cervids.

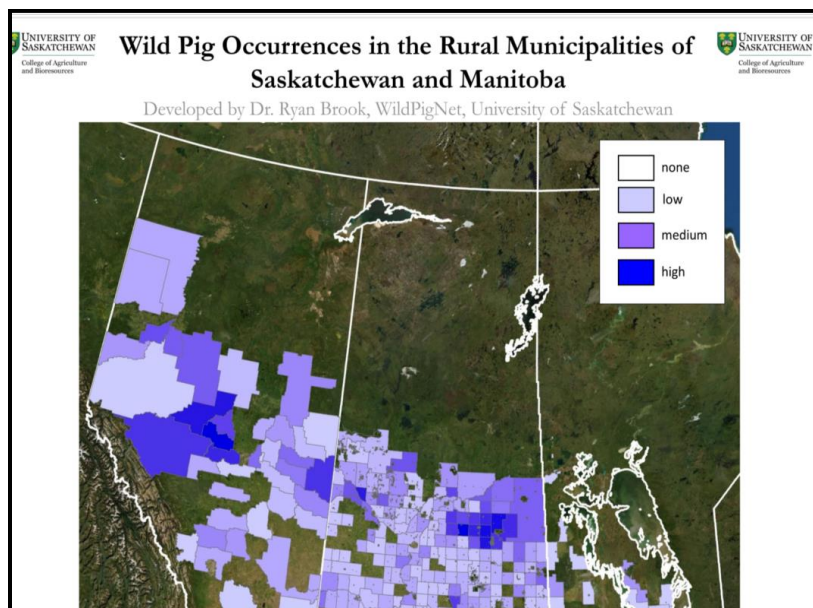
Wild Boars

The three prairie provinces have become havens for wild boars since the advent of game farming around 1980. Game-farmed Cervids (deer) were restricted to native species and were subject to some regulations like containment. Wild boars on the other hand, were brought into Alberta as livestock and were not subject to special regulations. Being smart and resilient animals, they soon escaped from many poorly-secured farms and began establishing wild colonies. They are now documented in 28 Alberta counties and 80% of Saskatchewan municipalities.

Belatedly, the Alberta Government decided to try to control these destructive creatures that can spread a variety of diseases. They are also large, dangerous animals to try to handle. In 2022, AWA reported that Alberta had launched a control program working with trappers and hunters through a bounty system that offers \$75.00 for each set of ears submitted. But this program has been panned since then by Ryan Brook, a University of Saskatchewan associate professor



considered Canada's expert on feral pigs. Brook explains that wild pigs in Canada are crosses between domestic pigs and European Wild Boars, are large, smart and reproduce prolifically, up to 3 litters per year with up to 6 piglets at a time. They live in colonies called 'sounders' and if these are disturbed, as by a hunter or trapper taking one, the others will become more secretive, will disperse, and proliferate even more.



While the title on this map from the University of Saskatchewan focuses on Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the incidence of Wild Boar in Alberta is clearly shown as well.

According to Brook, the only method of control with some success is to trap the entire sounder in food-laden pens with remotely-controlled gates. Wherever these animals have been released in the world and people have tried to control them, it has proved difficult to be impossible. Alberta's pilot runs for a year until March 31, 2023. Wild pigs are described as "a major threat to prairie agriculture" and as the planet's "worst invasive mammal species".

It gives AWA no pleasure to remind the Alberta Government that this organization vociferously opposed game farming and the introduction of wild boars as far back as the 1980s. Every adversity AWA predicted about farmed wildlife and the importing of wild pigs as "livestock" has, unfortunately, come true and their costs to taxpayers continues as a burden.

Wild Turkey

In February 2022, the *Management Plan for wild turkeys in Alberta* was released. The plan indicated the possibility of hunting, despite acknowledging the lack of data on how hunting would affect turkey populations. AWA received word of a licence being sold by the Wild Sheep Foundation which suggested turkey hunting may be permitted in Cypress Hills Provincial Park. AWA wrote to David Park, Director of Fish and Wildlife Policy at AEP, requesting clarification on whether wild turkey hunting would be allowed. While his initial responses suggested he was open to discussion on the topic of hunting, AWA has not received further clarification or confirmation for the allowance of hunting in Cypress Hills Provincial Park. AWA strongly opposes hunting in provincial parks for any reason other than management, particularly without public consultation and approval.

Native Trout

Alberta is home to several different species of native trout that have adapted to thrive in the cold, clear streams and lakes of the Rocky Mountains and Foothills. While many of them have large historical ranges reaching all the way to the prairies, native trout populations currently occupy only a small fraction of that range in small, isolated patches. AWA's vision for Alberta's native cold-water fish is for those populations to be recovered to self-sustaining levels.

The decline of native trout in Alberta indicates that our watersheds are not healthy, and that land uses on surrounding landscapes need to be considered more carefully to ensure native trout populations persist in the future. AWA has taken a stand on several ongoing proposals that we believe will harm native fish species. In general, forest management practices, management of motorized recreation, and protection of critical habitat all need to be greatly improved if native trout are to have a chance of recovering. No new development (e.g. roads, trails, transmission lines, pipelines, well sites, buildings, fences, bridges) should be allowed in areas that may damage critical habitat.

Athabasca Rainbow Trout

As of August 2019, Athabasca Rainbow Trout are listed as Endangered under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Following the release of the federal Recovery Strategy in 2020, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) released a Critical Habitat Order for Athabasca River populations of Rainbow Trout in March of 2021. SARA prohibits the killing, harming, harassing, capturing, and taking of extirpated, endangered, or threatened aquatic species at risk – which now includes this species. Activities that destroy critical habitat are likely to kill, harm or harass individuals, therefore this Critical Habitat Order provides additional protection for Rainbow Trout.

The federal government's approach to recovery planning under SARA follows a two-staged approach, which includes the development of the Recovery Strategy to be followed by the completion of an Action Plan – containing the specific measures and activities that are necessary to meet recovery objectives. The Action Plan for Athabasca Rainbow Trout has yet to be completed and AWA will continue to advocate for the timely release of this Action Plan and swift recovery actions to save this endangered species.

In September 2021, AWA returned to the site of the 2013 Obed coal mine tailings spill near Hinton to continue our monitoring of the restoration and recovery efforts at Apetowun Creek. Apetowun Creek is critical habitat for Athabasca rainbow trout, and AWA staff toured the length of the creek to observe and report on the reconstruction and revegetation work. As part of this site visit, AWA witnessed electro-fishing of pure strain rainbows, for the purpose of relocating them above an artificial barrier in the watercourse. The relocation is intended to provide them with their own isolated habitat and hopefully a better chance at recovery. AWA published an article about this trip in the Fall 2021 issue of our Wildlands Advocate magazine.

In September, AWA learned of West Fraser Hinton's intent to harvest timber within an area of the Berland River watershed near Moon Creek – a watercourse listed as containing critical habitat for Athabasca rainbow trout under the federal SARA recovery strategy. Since learning of West Fraser's harvest plans, AWA has working to ensure that the proposed logging will not destroy or damage any critical habitat that exists within this watershed. In October 2021, AWA sent a letter to the new federal minister of fisheries and oceans – Joyce Murray – outlining our concerns with these harvest plans, and to ensure that DFO takes the necessary steps to protect rainbow trout and their critical habitat within Moon Creek. Unfortunately, the recovery strategy



for rainbow trout follows the ‘bounding box’ approach to identifying critical habitat. This means that a field assessment is likely required to confirm whether or not critical habitat is actually present. AWA is hoping to have an independent assessment of critical habitat conducted for Moon Creek to help us in our efforts to protect Athabasca rainbow trout within this watershed.

Bull Trout

Saskatchewan-Nelson populations of Bull Trout were listed as Threatened under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) in August 2019. Following the release of the draft federal Recovery Strategy in June 2020, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) distributed a questionnaire survey to help inform the creation of their provincial Bull Trout Recovery Plan in July 2020. AWA completed the survey and provided additional comments to complement the survey and help improve the content in the final Recovery Plan.

In March of 2021, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) released a Critical Habitat Order for Saskatchewan-Nelson Rivers Populations of Bull Trout in Canada. SARA prohibits the killing, harming, harassing, capturing, and taking of extirpated, endangered, or threatened aquatic species at risk – which now includes this species. Activities that destroy critical habitat are likely to kill, harm or harass individuals, therefore this Critical Habitat Order provides additional protection for this population of Bull Trout.

In May of 2021, AEP released a draft of their Alberta Bull Trout Recovery Plan. AWA submitted a letter to AEP outlining our many concerns and recommendations on the proposed plan, as we felt that it was lacking in many areas crucial for the protection and recovery of bull trout populations in Alberta. We are still awaiting the release of the final plan by AEP, and we hope to see our feedback incorporated into the final version.

Westslope cutthroat trout

Westslope cutthroat trout are both provincially and federally designated as threatened and continue to be an ongoing priority for conservation efforts at AWA. A federal action plan was completed in December 2019 by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. This means that protection and restoration efforts for this species and its habitat must be implemented in a meaningful way.

During the Grassy Mountain Coal Project Joint Review Panel hearing AWA argued that the project’s impact on westslope cutthroat trout was one powerful reason, among several, for rejecting the project. Such arguments were favourably received. In June 2021 the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) denied Benga Mining Limited’s application to proceed with this project. The adverse impacts on westslope cutthroat trout figured prominently in the AER’s decision. So too did its adverse impacts on surface water quality. These negative impacts outweighed the low to moderate positive economic impacts of the project. The nature and magnitude of these effects are what drove the decision to deny the application, which AWA sees as a major triumph in the protection of this species.

In September 2021, AWA Conservation Specialist Phillip Meintzer joined Dave Mayhood – a retired aquatic ecologist – on a tour of critical habitat for westslope cutthroat trout across the Eastern Slopes from Calgary down to Crowsnest Pass. This trip helped to highlight the extent of human development in or near these critical habitat sites – such as roads, logging, wells and pipelines, improperly implemented culverts and erosion control measures – which all likely contribute to the continued decline of this threatened species. A summary of this trip was published in our Fall 2021 issues of the Wildlands Advocate.



DFO's Talk Fish Habitat Public Engagement

Across November 2021, as well as January and June 2022, AWA participated in second wave of the Talk Fish Habitat public engagement hosted by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). The Talk Fish Habitat engagement is organized by DFO's Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program (FFHPP). Wave two seeks to collect input from concerned stakeholders to continue modernizing and/or developing policies, frameworks, instruments, and guidance to further implement the fish and fish habitat protection provisions of the *Fisheries Act*. The topics subject to engagement in wave two included offsetting, cumulative effects guidance, the Fisheries Act registry, prescribed works and waters regulations, codes of practice, and DFO's engagement framework. AWA attended numerous webinars and question periods related to these various topics and submitted written feedback on cumulative effects guidance.

AEP Sportfishing Regulations Changes

In January 2022, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) hosted a series of virtual public information sessions as part of their annual fisheries engagement program. This engagement program outlined AEP's proposed changes to regulations for the 2022-2023 sport-fishing seasons and included an online survey for Albertans to provide their feedback on the proposed changes. AWA attended three of AEP's virtual information sessions and submitted our feedback through their online survey. One of the major changes being proposed under this engagement was new time-of-day angling closures for the Bow River and other East Slopes Zone 1 fisheries including the Oldman, Highwood, Crowsnest, and Elbow Rivers. These angling closures are intended to reduce stress on fish during warm weather over the summer months. AWA supported implementing a fixed-period angling closure in these fisheries, and we distributed an action alert to AWA members encouraging them to submit their own feedback based on our recommendations.

Wood and Plains Bison

AWA's vision is that wild bison are recovered in Alberta. Wood bison are North America's largest land mammal. AWA believes wood bison recovery is possible by designating and protecting critical habitat in the original range of wood bison, by managing to prevent further disease transmission, and by prioritizing Indigenous co-management and food sovereignty. Of Canada's nine free-ranging disease-free wood bison populations, the two at greatest risk of recovery are the Ronald Lake and Wabasca herds, both ranging over Alberta public lands south of Wood Buffalo National Park.

In 2021 AWA became an inaugural member of Alberta's Ronald Lake Bison Herd Cooperative Management Board. While Ronald Lake bison are now protected from non-Indigenous hunting, two large remaining threats are the risk of contracting diseases from bison in Wood Buffalo National Park and range loss from past and potential industrial activities. The Cooperative Management Board is in early stages and will advise Alberta on "matters related to the long-term sustainability of the Ronald Lake Bison Herd, including sustainability of the Indigenous traditional use of and cultural connection to the herd."





Wood bison roaming freely in the lush grasses and forests of Elk Island National Park © Christyann Olson

In June 2021 Canada and Alberta issued a draft Conservation Agreement for the Wabasca and Ronald Lake Bison Herds for public comment. AWA supported the proposed active role for Indigenous Peoples in the conservation, recovery, and management of the two herds. For Ronald Lake, we requested more stringent management of industrial leases and stronger commitments to secure and/or restore important habitat areas. For the Wabasca herd, we urged Alberta to promptly end unregulated hunting.

In November 2021, the Government of Alberta amended the *Alberta Wildlife Act* to finally designate wood bison as a Threatened species, and thus formally acknowledging wood bison as wildlife for the first time in our province. Until this amendment came into force, wild populations of wood bison were only considered as livestock and not legally recognized as wildlife in Alberta.

Under this amendment, wood bison are considered Threatened within specified Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) across the northern part of the province – one of which was newly created under this provision. A Threatened listing affords these WMU populations protection from hunting by anyone other than those with Indigenous and/or Treaty hunting rights.

AWA are encouraged to see these necessary changes being made to Alberta's archaic *Wildlife Act* and we hope that this signals renewed intent from the Government of Alberta to pursue ongoing and meaningful actions in the protection and recovery of wood bison populations in our province. 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 with the purpose of advising 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. We look forward to providing future updates to AWA members on the board's progress as we work towards the recovery of the RLBH.



Unlike wood bison, Alberta plains bison are considered livestock; they lack wildlife status under Alberta's *Wildlife Act* and have no federal status either. AWA believes that the status of Plains Bison should depend on whether they are located on a commercial farm, a private conservation herd, or in the wild, rather than the current geographical designation adopted by the province. This way, wild plains bison would get protection they desperately need to begin recovery in the wilderness.

Plains bison are being recovered in a 1200 km² rehabilitation zone in Banff National Park's remote eastern slopes. The provincial government has designated an adjacent 239 km² Upper Red Deer River Special Bison Area in Panther Valley, where plains bison are treated as protected wildlife to be redirected into the Banff zone. AWA hopes that this provincial designation is the first step towards differentiating types of plains bison according to ownership.

Limber and Whitebark Pine

Whitebark pine was added to the federal Species at Risk list as an Endangered species in June 2012. AWA has also worked towards having limber pine receive the same Endangered status under the federal law. COSEWIC gave limber pine Endangered status in 2014. Both species are listed as endangered provincially under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. A provincial recovery team has been established for both species. An Alberta Whitebark Pine Recovery Plan 2013-2018 was released in 2014 and an Alberta Limber Pine Recovery Plan 2014 - 2019 was released in the fall of 2014.



Whitebark pine male cones and five needle clusters @Cliff Wallis

Whitebark pine trees take 30 to 50 years before they can reproduce and, when they do produce cones, they rely on Clark's nutcracker birds to disperse and plant their seeds. Cornell's Lab of Ornithology calls them "evolutionary soul mates that help hold an ecosystem together." The long-lived, five-needle pines are native to high elevations, and are threatened by fire, climate change, and white pine blister rust. The blister rust is caused by a non-native fungus (*Cronartium ribicola*) introduced to North America around 1900. As the Cornell Lab's designation suggests, whitebark pine are crucial to the ecological composition of an area because they provide food and habitat for animals and help stabilize steep subalpine slopes.

The Grassy Mountain Coal Project represented an existential threat to this endangered species in southwestern Alberta. Benga Mining estimated that its proposed 15 square-kilometre open-pit coal mining operation would destroy 21,000 whitebark pine and 1,000 limber pines. The company proposed that it would plant three times the number of trees removed from the landscape. Cliff Wallis, in his evidence to the Grassy Mountain Joint Review Panel, argued that Benga underestimated the extent to which its strip mine will destroy critical whitebark pine habitat and its mapping of whitebark pine distribution was incomplete. This project's threat to endangered species such as whitebark pine was one of the important reasons why AWA opposed the project.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Public Lands

Public lands issues have been a priority for AWA since the organization was founded. AWA has continuously advocated for a comprehensive public lands policy that is developed in a transparent and inclusive way. Unfortunately, the government of Alberta has shown no urgency in tackling this issue. AWA believes that Albertans should be able to participate in the management of public lands, and that a public lands policy need to address important issues such as access, sales and transfers, surface rights compensation from oil and gas operators to grazing lessees, and conservation. AWA opposes any further destruction or conversion of native habitat, and disputes sales of public lands without a public lands policy developed through a transparent and democratic process.

A July 2015 Alberta Auditor General report criticized the Government of Alberta's systems for managing grazing leases, noting a lack of tracking for lease transfers or the value and benefits of leases realized by grazing lease holders, including substantial monetary compensation obtained under the *Surface Rights Act*. In 2019, the *Public Lands Modernization (Grazing Lease and Obsolete Provisions) Amendment Act* was released to address grazing lease fees, although it failed to address the flaws identified by the Auditor General. In his November 2020 report, the Auditor General reported that the Government of Alberta still had not acted on the recommendation that Alberta Environment and Parks "clarify objectives, benefits and relevant performance measures" for grazing leases. AWA will continue pressing the government to implement the Auditor General's recommendations and meet with civil servants to discuss policy and regulatory development. The glacial speed of the government's response reinforces our belief that we must tenaciously push the government on this issue.

The Recreational Access Regulation, originally enacted in 2003 under the *Public Lands Act*, was intended to clarify conditions for public access to grazing leases for recreational purposes. However, access issues have worsened significantly, with numerous grazing leaseholders preventing reasonable public access. The regulation expired in March 2017 and was renewed without full stakeholder or public consultation, although AWA continues to advocate for a reformed public lands policy to address this issue.

In October, the Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks reaffirmed the intent to sell 15,000 acres (6,070 hectares) of land to Mackenzie County in northern Alberta. The land would convert



boreal native habitat into agricultural lands. AWA remains adamantly opposed to all public land sales in wilderness areas, including native prairie habitats and boreal forest, and we are concerned about the lack of transparency and public involvement in land sales.

In speaking to government representatives, AWA has been informed of upcoming changes to the land sales process and records and are apprehensive of a transition which prioritizes the facilitation of land sales over environmental protection. AWA will continue to oppose the sale and conversion of public land for short-term economic gain, as maintaining the ecological integrity of public lands is incredibly important to the health and wealth of our communities.

AWA continues to promote our Public Lands video series to raise awareness of the issues facing public lands. Some topics addressed in the videos include “What are public lands?”, “What are the impacts of the use and abuse of public lands?”, “What are the laws and regulations that govern public lands?”, and “Can I use public lands?” In total, there have been over 5000 views on the videos in that series.

Crown Land Vision

In 2020, the Government of Alberta released The Alberta Crown Land Vision, a document outlining their vision for the public land-use system. The five-page document promised a “common-sense conservation plan” though provided few details. It claimed Albertans had said the current system needed improvements, including continued conservation, sustainable use of trails and land, and the removal of confusing and conflicting rules.

Since announcing the Crown Land Vision, the Government of Alberta has announced several legislative changes. These changes include Bill 21 (the *Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act*), and Bill 79 (the *Trails Act*). Bill 21, which received royal assent on May 31, 2022, modifies the *Provincial Parks Act* and *Public Lands Act* in such a way that allows the Minister to adopt documents from “any government, board, agency, association or person” as legally-enforceable rules. There seems to be no requirement for such documents that become regulations to be science-based or consistent with land-use planning to limit cumulative effects. This reduces public participation, transparency, and evidence-based decision making when it comes to setting important regulations for these lands. The *Trails Act* received royal assent on December 8, 2021 and gives the Minister of Environment and Parks the authority to designate trails and appoint third-party trail managers on public lands. AWA spoke out in opposition to both legislative changes and encouraged members to do the same. Decisions about where trails should be and what uses are appropriate on public lands need to be science-based and need to consider cumulative impacts of industry and recreation on the landscape. New trails shouldn’t be designated until regional and sub-regional plans, which are long overdue, are completed.

A ministerial order under the *Trails Act* was released on April 29th, 2022, and designates provincial trails across the southern Eastern Slopes region. AWA continues to engage with Environment and Parks staff as the details of how the *Trails Act* will be implemented, how these trails will be managed, and who will be the trail managers remains unclear and undecided.

As well, Kananaskis Conservation Pass and fees for camping have been implemented, reducing low-cost access to recreational areas. A promise was made for off-highway vehicle use fees, although as of 2022, no such fee has been implemented.

AWA is concerned with the wording and intent of the Crown Land Vision. The use of “Crown land” in place of “Public land”, as well as recent changes, are suggestive of attempts to



increasingly restrict access and privatize Alberta's public lands. AWA is also concerned for the blurring of protections currently offered through protected areas, as the Crown Land Vision has repeatedly mentioned a desire to simplify the system and increase efficiency. We have expressed these concerns through webinars with the Government of Alberta and discussions with Environment and Parks staff.

Tax-recovery Lands

Tax-recovery lands are lands mostly in southern Alberta that were at one time privately owned. They were forfeited to the Government of Alberta because of drought and the Depression and the inability of their owners to pay taxes. Since 1930, the province has managed some of these lands as public land. Most of this land has been under grazing leases for decades. AWA believes the long-term interest of all Albertans is best served by retaining tax-recovery lands as a trust held by government for conservation purposes. However, despite enormous public opposition to sales of public lands the government disposed of most of its tax-recovery lands, with no opportunity for public input. The program transferred tax-recovery lands to municipalities and was completed in the spring of 2017. Sensitive tax-recovery lands on or near rivers, water bodies or coulees have been retained by the province as public land. AWA is working with government departments to obtain data that will provide a picture of the amount of tax-recovery and public lands that have been retained as public lands.

Protected Areas - Federal

Ecological integrity, identified as the first priority under the *National Parks Act*, is the primary condition AWA uses to assess the activities of government agencies and private sector actors alike. AWA's long-term goal for Alberta's five National Parks is a management strategy that prioritizes supporting ecological integrity, and secondarily nurtures the connection between visitors and Alberta's wild spaces.

To support these long-term goals, AWA participates in Parks Canada's long-term management planning initiatives, including commenting on the 10-year Management Plans for each National Park, responding to species-at-risk and visitor use planning, and ensuring commercial development limits are upheld. AWA also responds to media requests on National Park use and collaborates with other ENGOs to understand ongoing projects and new developments in the National Parks.

AWA's long-term goal for Alberta's five National Parks is that they are managed primarily as wilderness areas, with the main objective of supporting the ecological integrity. A secondary objective of National Parks should be to nurture the connection between visitors and Alberta's wild spaces, however only where compatible with ecosystem function. Actions to help support these long-term goals include participating in Parks Canada's management planning initiatives, including the 10-year Management Plans established for each of the National Parks, long-term management plans for species at risk (e.g. Jasper's Southern Mountain Caribou Herds), and other planning exercises to manage visitor use and transportation (e.g. Banff's People Moving Strategy, proposals to twin the Canada Pacific Rail line between Calgary and Banff).

AWA's short-term goals are to ensure that the commercial development limits in the National Parks are upheld, that the ecological carrying capacity of sites within the National Parks are being respected, and that visitors are educated about respectful and sustainable use of National Park sites. Actions to meet these goals include responding to development proposals (e.g. Sunshine Ski Village Long-Range Plan and Detailed Impact Assessment, Calgary-Banff Passenger



Rail), taking media requests on National Park use, and staying up-to-date with our ENGO colleagues with ongoing projects in the National Parks (e.g. Bow Valley Naturalists, CPAWS Southern Alberta Chapter).

In 2021, AWA provided comments on the draft 10-year management plans for Alberta's three mountain national parks; Banff, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes. AWA was encouraged by the ongoing focus on ecological integrity, the further integration of Indigenous use, knowledge and language, and efforts to manage visitor use and transportation. AWA's engagement on Jasper National Park this year was largely focused on caribou conservation (see Caribou section). We continued to caution against the further commercialization of National Park spaces and services, particularly in Banff and Jasper which are close to reaching their carrying capacity for visitation. The final management plans were expected to be released in fall 2021 and have not been released as of July 2022.

Banff National Park

In early-2021, Banff National Park launched its "People Moving" Expert Advisory Panel, a group assembled to address the "sustainable movement of visitors in the Banff-Bow Valley". AWA supports the principles and mandate of the process; especially those that will address maintaining connectivity, key habitats and biodiversity, managing cumulative effects, and acknowledging that innovative solutions are needed to manage visitor movement while limiting new infrastructure on undeveloped park lands. We also encourage Parks Canada and the Expert Advisory Panel to consider how visitor use management intersects with transportation planning, and how Parks Canada will improve wildlife movement in the Banff-Bow Valley. We are still awaiting the final People Moving Strategy report, including recommendations, as of July 2022. The report was expected no later than spring 2022.

The Bow Valley Parkway, a highway that runs parallel to Highway 1 between Lake Louise and Canmore in Banff National Park, was closed to motorized vehicles for much of 2020 and 2021 to support social distancing at the popular Johnston Canyon hiking trail. This closure provided an opportunity for people to cycle this route safely and supported wildlife populations. AWA wrote to Parks Canada during a public consultation phase regarding the possible future closure of the Bow Valley Parkway in support of closing this stretch of highway seven days a week in the spring and fall starting in 2022 to support wildlife such as bears and wolves, and to encourage visitors to consider cycling instead of driving, thus decreasing carbon emissions. After the public consultation phase, Parks Canada implemented this annual highway closure seven days a week in the spring and fall starting in spring 2022.

A proposal to build a passenger rail between Calgary and Banff has been gaining media attention. Liricon Capital Inc., the proponent of this project, hopes to bring the project to completion and operation by 2025. Liricon also claims that the train could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by taking vehicles off the road and possibly powering the train by hydrogen. AWA and other conservation organizations have a lot of questions about this goal, and whether a train is the best way to address it. We also have concerns about how a train could negatively affect wildlife and habitat connectivity in the Bow Valley. As of July 2022, the province has not agreed to fund this project due to the financial risk. AWA will continue to advocate for science-based decision making when it comes to transporting people to and from Banff National Park, which is the most highly visited national park and cannot support increases in visitation.

In July 2022, AWA provided comments on the Sunshine Ski Village Long-Range Plan and Detailed Impact Assessment. AWA would like to see a vegetation inventory for the area, and better



protection for species-at-risk such as westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, whitebark pine, and grizzly bears. Because this ski area is in Banff National Park, ecological integrity must be prioritized in all management decisions.

Protected Areas - Provincial

The Land-Use Framework has been one of the primary mechanisms for achieving provincially protected areas. As reported for several years, the process is slow and has essentially been stalled as management plans are developed for the areas where Regional Plans already exist. As of this year, Regional Plans have only been developed and approved for two of Alberta's seven regions: the Lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan, and drafting is in progress for North Saskatchewan. AWA has participated in the regional planning processes and provides reasonable suggestions for protection and activities and mechanisms to achieve conservation, both within and outside of the Land-Use Framework process. Alberta still has a long way to go to meet international protected area targets that are representative of the six landscape types in Alberta.

In 2022, AWA provided detailed comments in response to the Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park Management Plan. AWA was supportive of the overall direction of the management plan to protect and conserve natural and cultural values, and to include Indigenous knowledge and guidance into management practices. While understanding the requirement to expand and accommodate greater visitor numbers, AWA emphasized the importance of focusing on protection and conservation, and the need to consider cumulative effects in disturbances. AWA also wrote supporting the proposed Big Island Provincial Park in Edmonton. The park, if established, will conserve a sensitive river valley system in the Parkland Natural Region, and will be managed cooperatively by the Government of Alberta, the Enoch Cree Nation and the City of Edmonton. AWA supported the preservation of the underrepresented park system, and the inclusion of the Enoch Cree Nation in governance.

Protected Areas Progress

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

The following data on protected areas comes from the Alberta Land Reference Manual, available at: <http://www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/library/land-reference-manual.aspx>. Each year, AWA includes this chart as a matter of historical record and progress made. Data for 2020 were calculated by AWA staff based on changes proposed by the "Optimizing Alberta Parks" decision. Without these changes the values for 2020 would have remained the same as in 2019.



Class	Number				Hectares			
	2022	2021	2020	2019	2022	2021	2020	2019
Wilderness Areas	3	3	3	3	100,988.79	100,988.79	100,988.79	100,988.79
Ecological Reserves	15	15	15	15	26,843.34	26,843.34	26,843.34	26,843.34
Wildland Provincial Parks	34	34	34	34	3,486,154.63	3,486,154.63	3,333,386.29	3,333,386.29
Willmore Wilderness Park	1	1	1	1	459,671.04	459,671.04	459,671.04	459,671.04
Provincial Parks	76	76	65	76	246,797.89	246,797.89	245,336.81	246,797.89
Provincial Recreation Areas	204	204	60	204	88,602.23	88,602.23	79,670.86	88,602.86
Heritage Rangelands	2	2	2	2	12,010.47	12,010.47	12,010.47	12,010.47
Natural Areas	138	138	128	138	129,378.98	129,378.98	128,043.09	129,228.98
TOTAL	473	473	308	473	4,550,447.37	4,550,447.37	4,385,944.30	4,397,529.66
Section 7 Land	10	10	10	10	1,450.51	1,450.51	1,450.51	1,450.51

Key Biodiversity Areas

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are being considered in Alberta following the IUCN's global standard for the identification of KBAs. KBAs are areas that are important for sustaining wildlife and general biodiversity and require at least one of the following characteristics: biodiversity is threatened, biodiversity is geographically restricted, are important for conserving the ecological integrity of broader systems, contain important biological processes or are irreplaceable. A kickoff meeting for identifying key biodiversity areas was held virtually on February 8, 2022.

The majority of KBAs in Alberta remain at a mapping stage. Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas are being evaluated for inclusion into the KBA network, and remaining sections are considered for the inclusion of target ecosystems. AWA is participating in discussions for focus areas and advocating for the inclusion of our Areas of Concern. AWA encourages KBA discussions to concentrate on the least fragmented areas and hopes the inclusion of important areas as a KBA will draw attention to the rapid loss of habitat and biodiversity.

Land-Use Framework

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

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP)

AWA has provided input on the continued land-use planning processes in the SSRP. The Livingstone and Porcupine Hills Land Footprint Management Plan (LFMP) and Recreation Management Plan (RMP) were released in early 2018. Currently overdue for release are the Biodiversity Management Framework, which was expected in 2015, as well as the Livingstone-



Porcupine Hills Human Spatial Footprint report, which was due within one year of the LFMP's and RMP's release (May 2019). AWA believes these plans should establish strict and enforceable limits on land use and linear disturbances within the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills, as well as the South Saskatchewan Region broadly, in order to meet conservation targets.

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

Throughout 2020, AWA participated in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills Recreation Advisory Group (RAG), in place to guide the implementation of the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills RMP. In late-2019, the RAG expanded its scope to include Bob Creek Wildland Provincial Park, Black Creek Heritage Rangeland and the two Castle Parks. AWA did not support the expanded scope of the group, as it opened the door to changes to the existing management plans and the potential reintroduction of motorized use in the Castle Parks.

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

North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP)

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

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

In July 2022 Environment and Climate Change Canada together with Alberta Environment and Parks officially endorsed the North Saskatchewan River for Canadian Heritage River Status. Heritage rivers are recognized for their natural, cultural, and recreational values.

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP)

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) is still missing important elements to help maintain and restore biodiversity to uphold Alberta's international commitments to sustainable development. The LARP Review Panel's 2016 report upheld First Nations' submissions that LARP was not adequately managing cumulative impacts of development. The report highlighted that cumulative effects of industrial development affect First Nations' constitutional rights, and that First Nations applicants believe that the LARP fails to balance interests; favouring industrial development. The Review Panel recommended the development and incorporation of a Traditional Land Use management framework into the LARP.



As of July 2022, the Government of Alberta had provided no information on its 10-year review of the Lower Athabasca Plan that is due to be completed in 2022. The LARP expires in September 2022 and will no longer be in place unless the Land-Use Secretariat commences a review before then. AWA continues to seek overdue LARP regulatory tools such as sub-regional surface disturbance plans and meaningful biodiversity management frameworks, including for species of particular importance to Indigenous communities.

We have advanced LARP land-use management through several of our activities profiled in more detail elsewhere. One is our engagement in caribou sub-regional caribou planning, including task force participation. Another is our efforts to improve Alberta's Ronald Lake wood bison habitat management. A third is our efforts with Indigenous and ENGO partners to seek follow-through on the elements of the Wood Buffalo National Park Action Plan.

Future Land Use Planning Regions

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

Biodiversity

AWA continues to spotlight evidence that Alberta's biodiversity is declining under the cumulative impacts of current land-use practices, and to seek the best opportunities for change. For example, in the past year Wild Lands Advocate articles profiled research on harmful cumulative impacts of oil sands airborne depositions on peat bogs, and concerns about cumulative impacts to forest ecosystems of glyphosate (RoundUp) applications by the forestry industry.

Alberta still lacks a provincial Biodiversity Strategy, which was supposed to inform regional and sub-regional planning from the 2008 era onwards. AWA believes that a meaningful Strategy would help Alberta to fulfill its important national and international commitments to maintain and restore its biological diversity, including upholding the 1995 *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy*.

AWA is participating in the province's sub-regional caribou land-use task forces. These are collaborative processes with rights holders and stakeholders to manage caribou ranges to achieve habitat conditions for self-sustaining caribou, while supporting multi-species and socio-economic goals (see Caribou section).

In January 2022, AWA was pleased to become a member organization of the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI). Since ABMI's inception, AWA has appreciated its objective and transparent biodiversity monitoring and analysis, which continues to be very valuable to inform responsible resource management and land stewardship in Alberta.

Pesticides

In March 2022, the Auditor General's report of Alberta Environment and Parks' Pesticide Management was released. The report found deficiencies in Alberta's regulation of pesticide sale, use, transportation, and disposal, and concluded AEP did not have adequate processes to minimize risks. AWA released a newsletter expressing concern over the lack of regulation and the potential for significant harm to the environment and to human and wildlife health. Both the newsletter and a post to our website encouraged Albertans to write to elected representatives expressing concern for the use of pesticides, and to support the cosmetic pesticide ban in



Edmonton. An article on the impact of neonicotinoids in songbirds was also published in the Wildlands Advocate.

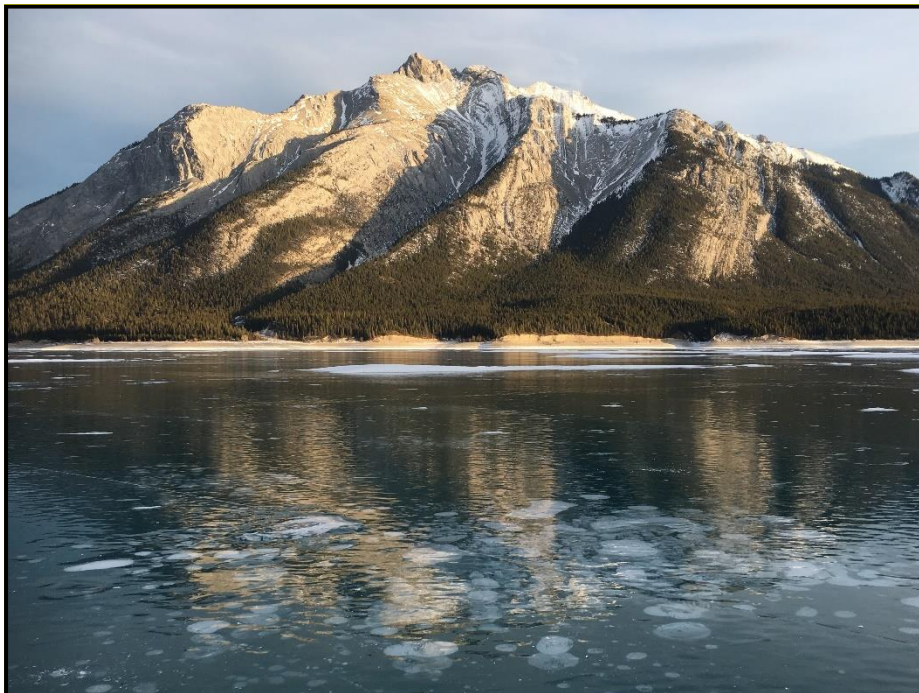
Strengthening Ties with Indigenous Communities

Each year, the AWA staff and board seek to better understand our role in the process of reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples of the land traditionally known as Turtle Island. To go beyond just improving our understanding, we also approach our work from a reconciliation perspective as we seek to ensure justice, equality, and sustainability for all people and the natural world we rely on.

In our work, this takes the form of building and strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities and helping to elevate the voices and actions of our Indigenous colleagues. We hope that our efforts to listen, learn and forge friendly relationships are seen by our Indigenous partners as meaningful acts of solidarity in our attempts to achieve shared goals. These efforts relate to all aspects of our work, especially with regards to our ongoing demands for Canada to establish a system of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).

In 2020, AWA joined many others in condemning systemic racism in our society and saying that black lives, Indigenous lives and the lives of racialized communities matter. While we believe many of our values are universal, we need to bring greater diversity into our Association and the environmental movement. Recent events have caused us to re-examine ourselves, and we will aim to be more reflective of Alberta's diversity in our composition, perspectives, thinking and values, the way we reach out, and the way we do things.

AWA's Board of Directors and staff includes Indigenous People. Beginning this year, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, September 30th will be recognized as a Statutory holiday for all AWA Staff. AWA is committed to being more inclusive and representative.



Mt Michener above Abraham Lake famous for its wintertime methane bubbles; Indigenous Vision Quest sites are in this area of the Bighorn Wildland. © Judith Wark

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Grasslands - Working in the Global Context

Grasslands have often been bottom of the list for conservation and economic priorities—that is changing. Ever since the Hohhot Declaration in 2008, AWA has been working on securing an international year of grasslands; now called the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. It has support from over 50 countries, including Canada, and hundreds of organizations, including the AWA. The UN General Assembly approved 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists this year. This will bring needed attention to the world's grasslands and hopefully new commitments and resources. For more information see <https://iyrp.info/>

In 2020, World Wildlife Fund established the Global Grassland and Savannas Dialogue Platform with monthly calls and it seems to have assumed some of the roles of the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative. WWF has been at the forefront of grassland conservation since the late 1980s with Prairie for Tomorrow in Canada and globally since the early 2000s when they identified temperate grasslands, including the Northern Great Plains, as one of their global conservation priorities. Over the past two years, the Platform has been busy at international meetings, including The Global Landscape Forum, World Conservation Congress, UN Food System Summit, Convention on Biodiversity, and UN Commission to Combat Desertification. The Platform has working groups doing mapping and data collection and identifying globally significant grassland and savanna areas. AWA has been active in that forum and continues to monitor international grassland conservation efforts through the Platform. For more information see <https://globallandusechange.org/en/projects/global-grassland-dialogue-platform/why-a-global-grassland-dialog-platform/>

Great Plains Conservation Network (GPCN)

At 3.4 million square kilometres (841 million acres), the Great Plains stretches from Canada through the United States and into Mexico. It is the largest grassland ecosystem in North America and one of the largest in the world. The vision is to establish an ocean of grass to support healthy wildlife populations and vibrant communities of people. GPCN participants have long contributed to four main foci – indigenous peoples, bison, prairie dogs and grassland birds.

GPCN has participants from Mexico, the United States of America and Canada and comprises dozens of conservation groups, tribal organizations, and individuals who have recognized the need to coordinate efforts on a scale that mirrors the area they seek to conserve. GPCN hopes to restore North America's grasslands, and to ensure the continued survival and health of its wildlife, wildlands, and human societies.

Working with other GPCN participants, GPCN helped retain federal ownership of PFRA Pastures in SW Saskatchewan that are critical for species at risk recovery efforts in Canada, including sage-grouse. GPCN participants continue to champion protection and appropriate management of many grasslands in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. These grasslands are some of the most extensive and diverse on the northern glaciated plains and they are home to dozens of federally and provincially listed species of concern. AWA, GPCN and others are concerned about the future protection and management of these lands now that they have been fully transferred to the Government of Alberta.



GPCN has been involved in the translocation of bison to tribal and public lands throughout the Great Plains and is working on tools for bison restoration and grasslands management. Recent work on mapping the Great Plains is proceeding to identify potential landscapes for conservation. Mapping is also underway to support black-tailed prairie dog conservation, along with efforts to control disease in prairie dog populations. Circulation of the Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Rapid Assessment Tool, which aids in determining whether ferret reintroduction is feasible, is ongoing.

AWA Board member Cliff Wallis is the current Chair of the GPCN and AWA hosts and maintains the website for the network at www.plainsconservation.org. Since June of 2021, AWA's Accounting and Administrative Associate, who became the Events Specialist and GPCN Coordinator in May 2022, has held the duties and responsibilities of the GPCN Coordinator.

Transboundary Grasslands Partnership

The Transboundary Grasslands Partnership works collaboratively to sustain healthy transboundary native biodiversity and the supporting grassland ecosystems and communities in Saskatchewan, Montana, and Alberta. Connectivity and ecosystem services across the transboundary region are a priority. It is a means to connect people from Tribes/First nations, governments, NGOs, and the ranching community and creates a forum for enhancing the health of native grasslands, creating opportunity to conserve native grasslands in the three jurisdictions, initiated by the PCF in 2016. AWA is a member of the partnership and has participated in their annual workshops, with staff and volunteers serving on the Board of Directors and several committees. In 2021, the annual workshop was hosted online with the theme of Global Vision: Local Action. In the fall of 2022 the annual workshop will be held in Medicine Hat.

The Central Grasslands Roadmap

“The Central Grasslands Roadmap is a collaborative guide to increase support for conservation of North America’s Central Grasslands, which span 500 million acres across Indigenous Lands, Canada, the United States and Mexico. By bringing together 8 diverse sectors and three countries, the Roadmap identifies common principles and shared priorities for the many people and organizations living and working on the Central Grasslands. The Roadmap will enable us to save what we have left, restore and improve what we can, and support biodiversity and resiliency across the landscape.”

AWA has been part of the roadmap initiative, helping to bridge some of the efforts being made by other individual groups and encouraging cooperation and collaboration across the prairies.

In May 2022, the Central Grasslands Roadmap held their first in-person summit at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, building on the virtual summit held in 2020. It brought together diverse voices involved in grasslands conservation to share ideas, examine priorities, and discuss the newest edition of the Central Grasslands Roadmap published in April 2022. AWA participated in the summit and as a member of the Canada working group. The summit solidified the main ideas and ended on a positive note.



OUTREACH

Outreach to members, supporters and the general public is a primary function as AWA strives to meet its mission "Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action by Inspiring People to Care".



Clockwise from top-left: (1) Post highlighting the Frank Lake Important Bird Area and announcing an A4W adventure visiting the site, as well as several others; (2) Post updating the public regarding the Chin Reservoir Impact Assessment – or lack thereof; (3) Post notifying the public that a new WLA issue is available; (4) Post highlighting AWA's concerns with using a "Bounding Box Approach" (BBA) to identify critical habitat for at-risk native trout.

Wild Lands Advocate

Wild Lands Advocate (WLA), published four times a year, is AWA's news journal and one of our main outreach tools. WLA offers news and information about AWA's past, current, and future work. Stories of Wild Alberta, the people involved in its conservation, and the state of AWA's numerous conservation campaigns are included. Free to all members, the WLA delivers a very



accessible, visually appealing, conservation message. AWA staff take the lead in shaping the content of WLA. Their contributions, plus those of skilled, thoughtful volunteers, create a product the Association is very proud of.

At the beginning of the year, our long serving editor, Dr. Ian Urquhart resigned his position. The first issue of the 2022 year was a team effort that focused on the good news on the nature front with guest Op-Ed from Graham Saul, ED Nature Canada. Our spring issue found guest editor Nathaniel Schmidt focussing on a closer look at our relationship with nature and how we manage to coexist and adapt to our wild neighbours across Alberta. A Cub Reporter feature was launched, and each issue will now include an article by a Cub Reporter. We believe it is important to feature guest articles from younger Albertans who have good reason to be concerned about the future of our shared wilderness spaces.

Extensive coverage of issues in this year included public lands and wild lands conservation; forests; species at risk including caribou, grizzlies, bison, and several of Alberta's threatened aquatic species such as native trout. Other articles have shone the light on such topics as consequences of neonicotinoid use on songbirds; provincial grazing reserves; herbicide and pesticide use in Alberta; irrigation concerns and prairie rivers; and the diversity of Alberta's parks (both urban and wilderness). We believe the WLA engages and inspires people about wilderness and wildlife in Alberta. Including a broad range of guest authors is an important step to becoming more inclusive of a broader audience. An advisory committee has been established to help guide future issues of the magazine. The Fall issue for 2022 will see staff Conservation Specialist Phillip Meintzer take the lead and become AWA's WLA Editor.

Online Presence

AWA contracts the services of Build Studio, a professional web development company, to provide support and maintenance for its public interface. AWA works to constantly update AlbertaWilderness.ca.

AWA has two primary websites:

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

and one single-issue website:

www.Caribou4Ever.ca

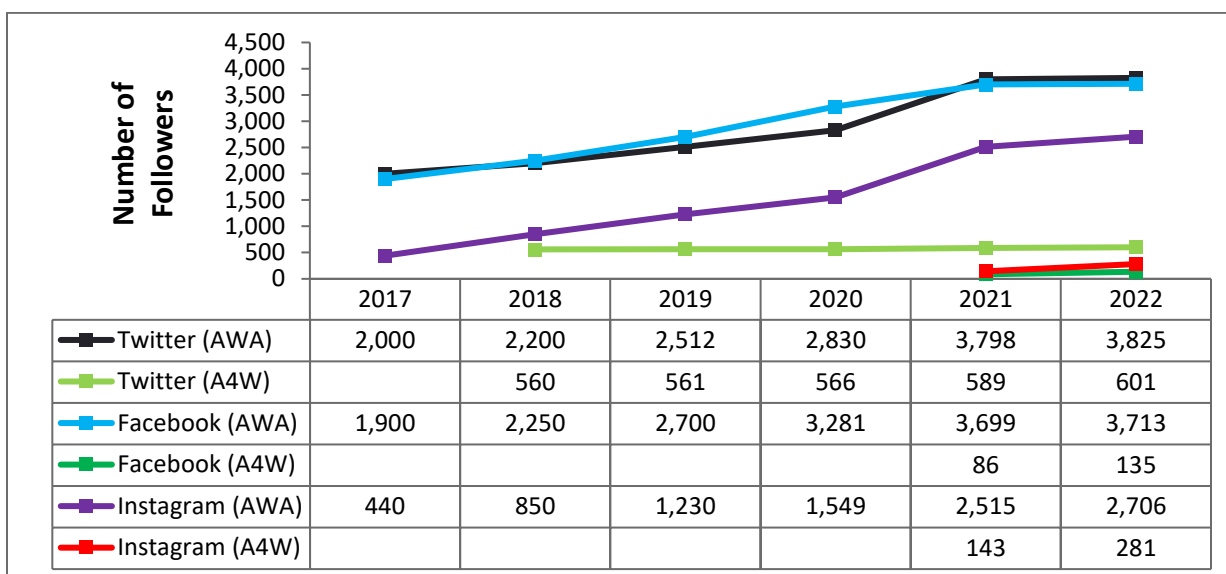
AWA has used MailChimp's electronic newsletter service since 2018 to deliver important messages to members, supporters and those who have self-selected to be on the lists. AWA adheres to the Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation. Our subscriber lists are:

- *Media* – 190 (2021 - 169) subscribers
- *Alberta Wilderness Association* – 3543 (2021 - 2,554) subscribers
- *Adventures for Wilderness* – 5152 (2021 - 4,584) subscribers
- *Grassy Mountain* – 229 (2021 - 223) subscribers

Social media

AWA maintains a social media presence focused on three primary platforms: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. On each platform we maintain two accounts, one focusing on our conservation efforts and the other specific to our *Adventures for Wilderness* (AWW) outreach programs.





- On Facebook, these accounts are @AlbertaWilderness and @Adventures4Wilderness.
- On Instagram, these accounts are @AlbertaWildernessAssociation and @Adventures4Wild.
- On Twitter, these accounts are @ABWilderness and @Adventures4Wild.

AWA continues to actively use these platforms to highlight our ongoing campaigns. We use social media to publish excerpts from *Wild Lands Advocate* articles; newsletters and action alerts; and to highlight and alert the public when we have sent a letter or submission on an issue of concern to AWA and its supporters. A4W adventures and other AWA events, such as talks, lectures and Town Halls, are posted as events on Facebook. The AWA Facebook and Twitter accounts are also used to share news releases, events advertising and featured articles to help share relevant information on conservation in Alberta. Finally, AWA staff members have individual Twitter accounts that they use to promote their conservation work with an enhanced personal perspective.

Engagement with these campaigns has been gratifying and these are proving an effective means of communication with an ever-growing audience. Social media is cost effective and an efficient way to develop brand recognition and increase AWA's reach to interested and engaged people. It provides a digital platform for outreach and messaging of important news.

Staff have spent significant time over the recent years refining AWA's approach to social media. For both our outreach- and issues-based messaging, we have found that engagement on Instagram is often the most productive and leads to best returns, thus there has been an increased focus on this particular platform over the past number of years. At the same time, when posts address controversial topics, we found Facebook in particular attracted misinformation and at times personal attacks, for which we have developed protocols on how to respond.

Talks

The COVID pandemic has required AWA to make major changes to how one of our signature offerings – AWA's speaker series – was delivered. Instead of in-person sessions, AWA's talks have been delivered via Zoom videoconferencing. For our *Martha Kostuch Wilderness and Wildlife Annual Lecture* series, we were able to experiment with having a very small audience



present at AWA's Hillhurst Cottage School, while simultaneously broadcasting the lecture over Zoom to a wider audience. This approach worked extremely well, and we look forward to expanding this approach for future talks and events, as we are allowed to host larger in-person gatherings once again. One of the unexpected benefits that COVID has brought, has truly been the ability to leverage this technology to reach a broader audience than the physical limitations of our talks and events once allowed. We have been able to have – not just speakers – but audience members from all corners of the province, across Canada and around the world.

During the year, in addition to a number of Zoom talks given as part of our Adventures for Wilderness program, we offered four events as part of our regular "Tuesday Talks" program: one on the Trails Act by Jason Unger of the Environmental Law Centre, one on Alberta Peatlands by Dr. R Kelman Wieder of Villanova University in Pennsylvania, one on energy autonomy focusing on indigenous communities by Dr. Nick Mercer of Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, and one by Kevin Timoney on his book *Hidden Scourge* about fossil fuel industry spills. Each of these Zoom talks included a question and answer session with participants. Over 340 people registered to participate in these four talks.

In addition to these Tuesday Talks, AWA was pleased to host an election debate, also held over Zoom, for the federal riding of Calgary Confederation, as part of the "100 Debates on the Environment" project spearheaded by GreenPAC. Nearly 150 voters tuned in to hear candidates communicate their, and their parties', environmental positions, and policies.

Finally, we held two evenings as part of our *Martha Kostuch Wilderness and Wildlife Annual Lecture* series. Awards were given to outgoing AWA Executive Director Christyann Olson, and RCMP Officer Wayne Howse. Each of these recipients delivered a presentation during which they told stories of notable episodes during their respective times in the defense of Wild Alberta. These presentations were held in a hybrid zoom / in-person format, which AWA is eager to continue, and expand upon going into the future.

Adventures for Wilderness

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge holding in-person events, AWA's *Adventures for Wilderness* program (A4W) celebrated its third year of proving itself well-suited to meet and adapt to this challenge. Launched in 2020, A4W is a framework to help inspire people to create adventures and learn more about wilderness and wildlife. The program adapts the underlying approach used by AWA's former keystone outreach event, the Climb for Wilderness, so that participants may participate in an event and raise funds to support AWA through that event. It expands the approach to cover an ongoing schedule of smaller, self-contained events. In this way, even events that only have a small number of physical participants (which is to be expected in the context of a pandemic like COVID-19) can leverage networking effects to still attain recognition and fundraising goals for AWA.

Despite this, we have noticed increased participation over the years as people become more familiar with the A4W program and the diversity of adventures and events we are able to offer under its umbrella. With the relaxing of COVID protocols in 2022 we have been able to increase the number of participants we invited on many of our adventures, and even given this fact have seen several of those adventures fill to that larger capacity.

A4W is rooted in a website, hosted at www.adventuresforwilderness.ca. Potential *adventure coordinators* sign up to host an Adventure. AWA staff work with that coordinator to ensure the



adventure is consistent with AWA's goals and outreach and conservation objectives. Details of the adventure are posted to a dedicated sub-section of the above website where participants may sign up and raise funds for that adventure. Adventures are promoted via social media and newsletters.

Many of this year's adventures were group outings with participants coming together to undertake a shared adventure. These have encompassed a wide range of activities open to all fitness and experience levels. They ranged from a walks in Calgary's urban Nose Hill Park to a snowshoe trek in Kananaskis, hikes in Banff National Park, an art-based getaway in the wilderness, several birding tours on the prairies, several canoe trips on some of Alberta's threatened rivers, with many activities, field trips, educational outings, and hikes in between.

An Earth Day Adventure cycling and climbing outdoor stairs in Calgary was particularly well-received by supporters who had once made the Climb for Wilderness part of their regular annual springtime routine. AWA is optimistic that we can hold such an Adventure in future years, and that it may be one that is easily replicated in other cities around Alberta.

The A4W program is well-suited to include an educational component in each Adventure. Examples of these included lectures held over zoom and field trips to learn about issues such as abandoned oil well recovery, gravel mining concerns, or Alberta's native pollinators.

A particularly successful Adventure, and one that will have lasting benefit to AWA and our supporters, was the *Kids' Citizen Science* series: a set of six adventures, held once a month from January through June 2022. Each Kids' Citizen Science adventure focused on a different aspect of Alberta's Wilderness: snowflakes, coyotes, pollinators, orchids, grizzlies and linnii (bison). They were held over Zoom and featured guest experts, interactive crafts to help participants learn about the topic, books and videos, all tied together via Google virtual classrooms. The virtual nature of the Adventures has meant that AWA is able to host these classrooms and videos on our website for future generations of young Albertans to learn from and enjoy.

Some adventures featured "solo" adventurers, with one or two people undertaking a personal challenge, raising funds, and sharing their progress. Many of these Adventures include some form of exploring areas of great interest to AWA and our supporters. Reports from those Adventures naturally integrate into AWA's communication and outreach efforts. For example, Sean Nichols personal cycling Adventure in summer 2021 took him to visit 82 of the parks that were slated for closure under the government's "Optimizing Parks" plan before that plan was rescinded in December 2020. Reports from that trip on both traditional and social media reached beyond AWA's traditional audience and informed a broader cross-section of Canadians about concerns relating to Alberta's public lands and protected areas. This is a model that AWA strives to follow for future adventures as well.

Most Adventures have had an expert present to give guest lectures and or explanations of the many sites and items of interest found in the course of the Adventure. AWA is indebted to the many experts who graciously donate their time and expertise to the A4W program.

In summary, 37 Adventures were offered over the 2021-2022 year, with 20 unique coordinators, and 368 participants. These Adventures included 448 sponsors and raised \$45,716. While the last few years, and COVID-19, have undoubtedly presented AWA with some challenges the



success of the Adventures program is inspiring. AWA is enthusiastic about the future of A4W, and its entire outreach program.

Leave No Trace

The number of Albertans using our province's wild spaces for recreation has increased significantly. These increased numbers of people brought with them an increased impact on a landscape only marginally prepared for it. The downside has manifested itself as increased litter and other waste, increased erosion as people travel and camp off-trail, increased disturbance of wildlife, and increased incidence of unsafe fires and other practices.

In response, AWA, with the financial support of the Calgary Foundation, launched a *Leave No Trace* initiative in the summer of 2021 to remind and educate backcountry visitors about the importance and principles of leaving no trace while in Alberta's natural spaces. Throughout the summer, AWA delivered an outreach program based on seven principles of *Leave No Trace* to help visitors mitigate their impacts on parks and wilderness areas. Those seven principles are:

1. Dispose of waste properly
2. Plan ahead and prepare
3. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of your fellow visitors

The program incorporated social media engagement, website engagement, volunteers initiating conversations at trailheads, and a short survey of users to help understand backgrounds, level of experience and expertise, preparedness and motivation to *Leave No Trace*. With a core of dedicated volunteers we were able to conduct a successful campaign and reach some important conclusions. These volunteers engaged with the public on 20 different occasions throughout August and September of 2021, at 11 different locations. Volunteers at trailheads and in campgrounds encouraged *Leave No Trace* behaviours and surveyed 223 users. The locations included urban parks in Calgary and Red Deer, several trailheads in Kananaskis Country, various locations in the Ghost and along the TransAlta Road, and various wetlands and natural areas in Central and Southern Alberta, including the Red Deer River valley. Engagement on social media produced 57,000 total impressions (views) and 2,233 total engagements (likes, comments, re-tweets, etc.) during the six weeks of the social media campaign.

AWA's 2021 Leave No Trace program has inspired others to create similar programs and AWA has been invited to provide a webinar to talk about our program and help others develop similar programs in their regions.



STRENGTH AND CAPACITY

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

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

Volunteers are crucial to our success. Volunteers help with on the ground protection of wilderness, office assistance, office and garden maintenance, and organization of and participation in events such as talks, benefit concerts, casino fundraising, and Adventures for Wilderness. In 2021 - 2022 AWA had 79 active volunteers who contributed more than 1200 hours.

Roger Creasey Wilderness Resource Centre

Wilderness Resource Centre archiving and cataloguing in ongoing. Development and growth of the Electronic Wilderness Resource Centre (EWRC) has continued. Our objective to have top of the line technology and storage capacity, is in place.

Identifying and removing duplicate files/images on EWRC is an ongoing long-term effort as is work on the media library, when resources allow, we will add tags, metadata and comments to categorization of files to assist when looking for a specific item.

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

AWA's Cottage School

AWA's Cottage School is a major asset and normally the building is filled with meetings, events, and people. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have meant we have minimized the presence of staff in the office and for the most part have been working remotely. We look forward to welcoming friends and colleagues back to the office when the COVID-19 pandemic has passed. During the 2020–2021-year, restoration work on the hardwood floors was completed as part of the repairs needed following the hot water tank flood of March 2020. In 2022, rodent guards were added to the solar panels to keep pigeons out from under them. Landscaping and work to maintain the gardens is ongoing.



FINANCING WILDERNESS PROTECTION

Funds received from donations by members, supporters and fundraising efforts are vital to the health of AWA, these contributions provided 83% of our total revenue (2020-2021 - 83%).

Granting agencies in this year included Alberta Government Recreation and Physical Activity Division, Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the following Calgary Foundation Funds, A. Lawrence Berry Family Environment Fund, the Maja Foundation, Pelzer Family Flow Through Fund, Pelzer Family Fund, Robert and Jennifer Sadee Fund. AWA qualified for the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy and Canada Recovery Hiring Program as our revenues fell sufficiently to meet the requirements for the subsidy. Fundraising and gifts from donors allow AWA to be financially independent and free to speak out for wilderness protection without risk of compromise because of funding considerations.

An achievement we are very proud of came from a review of our operations by Charity Intelligence, a Canadian watchdog for charities. They have given AWA an **A and a five star rating**. This is significant recognition for AWA. AWA is one of the top 100 rated charities in Canada. Only eight environmental charities were included in the top 100 list; of the eight environmental charities AWA was one of only two provincial organizations recognized there.

AWA devoted 72% (2020-2021 - 70%) of its cash expenditures to wilderness stewardship, conservation, and outreach. Development costs include expenses incurred in developing our core values and creating broader awareness of the association and its mandate, “Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action.” This category includes the cost of seeking more members and supporters as well as applying for grants. General and Administrative costs of 14% (2020-2021 15%) continue to represent an efficient and carefully managed association, supported significantly by volunteerism.

Our voting membership stands at 6,067 (2021 – 6,279) individuals; representing 225 (2021 – 227) communities in Alberta. AWA has more than 570 supporters from across Canada and around the world. We seek and welcome new members and supporters on an ongoing basis.

Review Engagement Report

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



Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Legacy Circle

Bequests

Bequests make a significant difference to our long-term security and our ability to plan for the future. For those interested in planning a gift for AWA there is a section on our website dedicated to ways to give with information about AWA that will be needed for your will.

Wilderness and Wildlife Bequests

Daphne M. Smith *1980*
Dr. James Birkett Cragg *1997*
Anna Nowick *1999*
Myrtle Muriel Koch *2001*
Ian Ross *2003*
Dorothy Barry *2003*
William Mayer *2004*
Diane Hughes *2005*
Harold deVries *2009*
Ann Roberts *2009*
Richard Collier *2013*
Harriet Ruth Mowat *2016*
Kim Bennett *2016*
Carol A. Haines *2017*
Wendy Williams *2017*
Herbert G. Kariel *2017*
Ted Davy *2018*
Richard Pharis *2018*
Del Lavallee *2019*
Meyer Estate *2019*
Doris Davy *2019*
Helen Dixon *2020*
Robert Bartlett *2020*
Annemarie Marriner *2021*
Stanley Daniel Rosenbaum *2022*
Ross Murray *2022*



Lifetime Giving

AWA recognizes all donors and the lifetime giving and commitment they make to the association. All those donors who have cumulative gifts greater than \$20,000 are recognized on a plaque initiated for AWA's 45th anniversary. They are recognized as Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors. A new plaque recognizing donors with lifetime cumulative gifts greater than \$55,000 has been added to our donor recognition wall.

AWA's Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors

Benefactors with Lifetime Gifts of more than \$55,000

Ian Ross
 Herbert Kariel
 Bruce and Eveline Goodall
 John Maude and Susan Quinn
 Laura Jackson
 Chris and Ken Havard
 Richard and Vivian Pharis
 Chris and Jennifer Saunders
 Rosemary Nation
 Joe Vipond and Family
 Christyann Olson
 Cliff and Terry Wallis
 Dorothy Berry and The Berndt Family
 Mary Kettenbach
 Michael Bloomfield
 Anonymous

Benefactors with Lifetime Gifts between \$20,000 - \$55,000

Lorne Fitch
 Clint and Julie Docken
 Anthony and Liz Fricke
 David and Cathy Mayhood
 Donna Hammerlindl
 Diane and Kevin Mihalcheon
 Linda and Yusuf Javeri
 Glen and Lois Mumey
 Richard and Carol Secord
 Alan and Madeleine Ernst
 David and Vikki Reid
 Doris Davy
 John and Barbara Poole
 Peter Campbell
 Sarah Leete
 Darryl Hay
 Ronald Sagert
 Glen Stenabaugh
 Catherine Fuller
 Anonymous



Memorial Tributes

Memorial tributes made by family and friends mean a great deal. AWA is honoured to receive donations that honour the memory of those who have gone before and will always be remembered.

Donations in Memoriam 2021 – 2022

Bruce Anderson *1954 - 2022*
 Anna Hordern Dahonick *1988 - 2022*
 Morgan Dyck *1955 - 2022*
 Thomas Franks *1926 - 2022*
 Barry Hertz *1949 - 2022*
 William (Dick) Jull *1931 - 2022*
 Bryan Klatt *1972 - 2022*
 Barb Collister *1953 - 2021*
 John Clarence Duffy *1941 - 2021*
 Jackie Eason *1931 - 2021*
 Barry Emes *1945 - 2021*
 Jean Gaucher *1940 - 2021*
 Andy Hill *1948 - 2021*
 Dale Morasch *1958 - 2021*
 Roxie Neale *1922 - 2021*
 Richard Pharis *1937 - 2018*
 Weslyn Mather *1945 - 2015*
 Paul K Anderson *1927 - 2014*
 Sharon Tranter *1940 - 2013*
 Charles A. Miller *1921 - 2009*
 Joanne Dunford *1921 - 2009*
 Mel Dunford *1924 - 2008*
 Ray Sloan *1941 - 1996*
 Kenneth and Mary Bunn
 Brian and Cindy Luini
 David Manzer
 Murray Manzer
 Elizabeth Nicholls
 Gursharn Mann
 Our family and friends who have gone before



Recognition for Outstanding Individuals

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

Adam Thorhaug	Ethan Gourley
Ainsley	Katrina Muller
Barbara Naden	Nathan Schmidt
Jack Siferd	Kevin and Joy Smith
Bonnyville Medical Clinic	Madeleine Patton
Caroline	Mathais Pocock
Charlie Myles	Maureen Bush
Christian-Wowk Family	Michael Savilow
Christyann Olson	Michael Tourond
Clyde Corser	Pat Mahaffey
Eric	Paul Kozhimannil
Gavin White	Peep and Nut
Isabelle Bauer	Phillip Turnbull
Joseph Spowart	Richard Johnson
Julia Casorso	Salim Abboud
Karel Jambor	Shona
Kari	Thomas Oakley
Karli Gourley	Trevor Meador

Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust

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

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

The fund balance has grown over time and is a tribute to numerous small donations from concerned individuals. At the end of July 2022, the balance is \$28,150.59 (2021– \$30,913). The endowment fund's annual distribution \$1470 (2021 – \$1,195) is dedicated to covering the costs of the Martha Kostuch Annual Wilderness and Wildlife Lecture and the Wilderness Defender Awards.



Alberta Wilderness and Wildlife Trust Guest Lecture

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

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

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

In the 2021-22 fiscal year AWA offered our members and the public two Martha Kostuch Lectures. There have been some incredibly deserving recipients of AWA’s Wilderness Defenders award since it was first given in 2001, but none could be considered more worthy than this year’s recipient, outgoing AWA Executive Director Christyann Olson. Christyann joined AWA board members and past presidents Cliff Wallis and Vivian Pharis for an informal look back at her long involvement with AWA, which culminated in her appointment as executive director in 2000. Christyann paid tribute to the early AWA pioneers who set the tone for so much that was to come; characters such as Dick Pharis, William Michalsky, Floyd Stromstedt, and Steve Dixon, all preceded her as Wilderness Defenders Award recipients. “They were rebels,” said Christyann. “They pulled away from the Alberta Fish and Game Association, because their mandate really didn’t include the direct action that was needed.” From these rebellious roots, AWA began. “AWA was feisty,” she said. “Those rebels set the stage for 56 years.”

On December 14, AWA recognized (semi-) retired RCMP officer Wayne Howse with one of two 2021 Wilderness and Wildlife Defenders Awards, in recognition of his “steadfast dedication in protecting public lands and wildlife, while both on and off duty.” As part of this award, AWA were delighted to invite Wayne to deliver the second annual lectures. Unfortunately, due to covid regulations, Wayne was unable to deliver his lecture in the traditional manner, and so once again his audience were obliged to listen in via Zoom. But participants were treated to some fascinating insights into Wayne’s 36 years as a full-time RCMP officer in Alberta, BC, and the Yukon.

His Albertan roots go back a long way, as far as great, great, great grandfather Joseph Howse who came to Canada on a ship and eventually made his way to Rocky Mountain House, where he worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company. “He was a very good friend of David Thompson, even though Thompson was with the Northwest Trading Co.,” said Wayne. “Joseph Howse attempted to cross into BC through Howse Pass and was turned away by the Piegans who did not want that pass opened. So he had to go down through the Athabasca Pass.” In 1810 David Thompson named Howse Pass after his good friend.



ANNUAL WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE TRUST LECTURE AND AWARDS

Wilderness Defenders Awards

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

These individuals have recognized that Alberta's wilderness is among the most pristine in the world and cannot be taken for granted. They know that our wild places are the source of our health, wealth, and quality of life and that we must take an active role in their conservation. In 2021 - 2022 over the course of two videoconference events, the award was presented to AWA's retiring and long-serving Executive Director, Christyann Olson, and to retired public lands defender and RCMP officer, Wayne Howse.

Christyann Olson has long been associated with AWA, in fact, it has been a 50-year association, with her late husband, Ray Sloan being an early president and Christyann having assumed many early roles in establishing the AWA. After a long career in health service, Christyann left that behind and was able to be drafted onto the board of the AWA in the late 1990s. Her talents for organizing and working with people became more and more obvious until AWA's board asked her to assume the Executive Directorship in 2000. It was supposed to be an interim appointment, but it lasted 21 years and the AWA will be forever grateful for her dedication and skills.

Wayne Howse began his life in North Central Alberta, on a Metis Settlement where he learned many land and farm-based skills. As a schoolboy, he was treated to the opportunity to accompany RCMP officers on their rounds and their job appealed to him so much that he joined the force right after high school. Wayne never lost his interest in the land and during his long career with the RCMP, always gravitated towards land protection where he was known for his ability to quietly enforce as well as educate when infractions occurred, or bad behaviour was evident. Wayne is part of an important heritage family - with his great grandfather (several times over) being the Howse that Howse Mountain and Howse Pass are named for.

Great Gray Owl Awards

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

2010 marked the launch of AWA's *Great Gray Owl Award*. Inspired by three outstanding women and the significant contribution they made over several years. The award is presented annually as individuals meet the high standard of volunteerism, dedication, and commitment of these inaugural award winners. Anne Fabris, Linda Javeri, and Margaret Main were the 2010 recipients of the award. Ed Hergott received the award in 2011. Paul Sutherland and Nuno Fragoso were awarded the Great Gray Owl in 2013. In 2014 we recognized Heather Crone. Bob Baxley accepted our award in 2015 and in 2016 Heinz Unger was recognized as AWA's Great Gray Owl. In 2017 we honoured Kevin Mihalcheon, and in the fall of 2018, we recognized George Campbell and Murray Little for their dedication to the Music for the Wild Program. In 2021 we honoured Chris Saunders with the prestigious Great Gray Owl Award. His untiring support and volunteerism set a standard equalled by the three women who inspired this award.



HOPE FOR TOMORROW

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

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

- Christyann Olson



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

