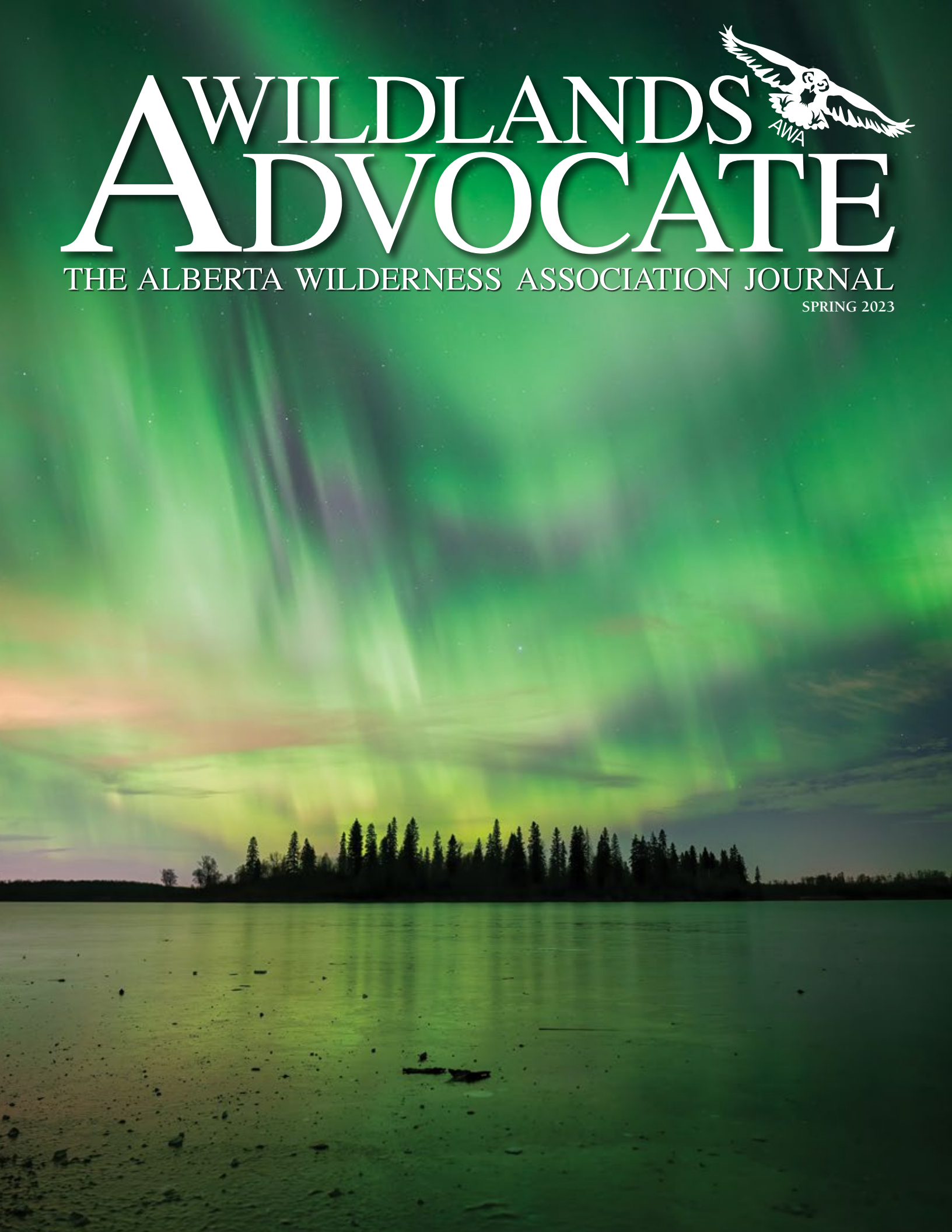


A WILDLANDS ADVOCATE



THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

SPRING 2023



C O N T E N T S

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Cover Photo "On a cold early November evening in 2021, I headed out to a small lake southeast of Edmonton in anticipation of an upcoming geomagnetic storm. The lake had frozen over the night previous and as the lights started to dance above an island in the distance, the colours reflected on the lake's icy surface. Just after midnight, the aurora reached such an intensity that it rivalled many of the displays I'd seen at much higher latitudes in the far north. The show continued right through to sunrise, making it one of the most memorable northern lights displays I've ever seen in Alberta!" – *Mark Jinks*



Mark Jinks

Editorial Note Dear Wild Lands Advocate readers, AWA members and supporters, I would like to welcome you all back to another springtime here in Alberta, and to our first magazine of 2023! As we move towards brighter and warmer days amidst Spring's renewal, one topic seems to be on the mind of many Albertans – ourselves included – which is the upcoming provincial election. Environmental policies are front and centre to this latest issue, beginning with Conservation Director Carolyn Campbell's excellent summary of the policies that AWA are hoping to see across the platforms of Alberta's political parties in their upcoming campaigns. AWA Board member Nathaniel Schmidt has also provided a thorough overview of the changes to Alberta's environmental laws, policies, and regulations that have been implemented over the most recent leadership term since 2019. Policies and regulations form a common theme elsewhere in this issue, with a summary of AWA's report on trail damage from permitted OHV use in the Bighorn backcountry, the impacts of forestry on the survival and recovery of at-risk woodland caribou in west-central Alberta, as well as a new agreement for the conservation of biodiversity out of COP15 in Montreal. With warmer weather on the way, we hope that many of you will consider participating in any of our upcoming Adventures for Wilderness listed on the back cover. As always, I would like to thank you for taking your precious time to learn about wilderness issues in Alberta, and supporting AWA in all the work that we do.



Phillip Meintzer
AWA Conservation
Specialist and
Wild Lands
Advocate Editor

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

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

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Provincial Election 2023:

Environmental Platforms We'd Like to See

By Carolyn Campbell

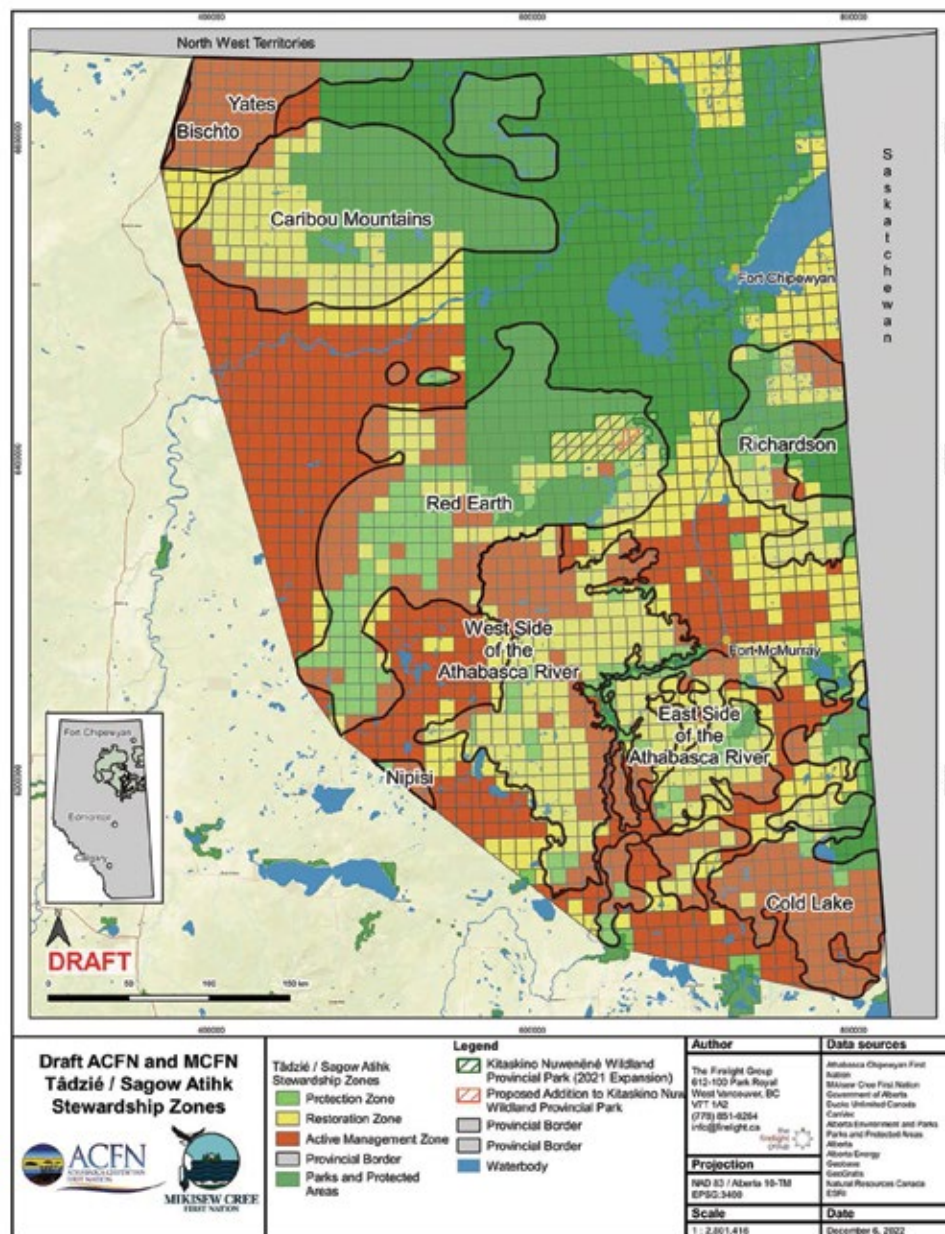


Albertans are set to elect their next government this spring. The May 29 election date could mark an important crossroads for our priceless waters and lands, here are key measures Alberta Wilderness Association is seeking in political parties' election platforms. Because of the breadth of the first two items, I've dug further into why and how to navigate there.

Please talk up 'conservation' with your family and friends, tell parties and your local candidates to be aware and ambitious on these issues, and get out and vote!

Complete enforceable 'sub-regional' land-use plans this term, to effectively manage and reduce cumulative human land-use impacts for woodland caribou ranges, for the Eastern Slopes, and for priority parklands and grasslands areas

What: Sub-regional plans are key missing pieces in Alberta's land management. They're more targeted than 'Regional Plans' that Alberta completed for the Lower Athabasca (LARP) in 2012, and the South Saskatchewan (SSRP) in 2014. Sub-regional plans specify how and where human-caused land disturbances — such as recreation trails, roads, cutblocks, and industrial infrastructure — will be managed, limited, and restored over specified time periods to achieve key goals.



'Protection', 'Restoration' and 'Active Management' draft land-use zones in the landmark Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation Tādzīé-Sagow Atihk (boreal caribou) Stewardship Plan, Dec. 2022. The Plan is a living document intended to be used in processes to advance protection of northeast Alberta boreal caribou. Photo © Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation.

Why: To conserve and restore ecosystems and habitat that are being fragmented or destroyed by our unmanaged cumulative land-use impacts to date. Alberta's social and economic well-being depends upon relatively intact landscapes providing life-giving clean air, waters, and soils. We also need strong sub-regional land-use plans as part of our commitment to reconciliation, to honour our Treaty commitments and uphold the constitutionally protected rights of Indigenous peoples on whose traditional territories we live and work. Further evidence that Alberta needs to get serious about completing effective sub-regional land-use plans is provided by a series of Alberta-based Indigenous lawsuits, plus BC's comprehensive January 2023 land-use agreements with Treaty 8 First Nations, arising from a 2022 BC Supreme Court ruling.

How: By working in partnership with Indigenous rights holders, who are provided with timely, sufficient capacity. Alberta needs to integrate (or braid) Indigenous ways of knowing, vision, knowledge and values with evidence-based western science, to achieve outcomes that meet both ecosystem needs and Indigenous Rights outcomes. Integrate local community and other stakeholders' knowledge to optimize those measures for environmentally sustainable, thriving communities.

Alberta's first two sub-regional plans, for Cold Lake and Bistcho Lake, were completed in April 2022. They indicate a positive shift by Alberta to set up cross-ministry systems to track, coordinate and limit total land-use surface disturbances over significant areas. However, they lack strong actions within the first decade of the plans and defer too many decisive steps for later decades. They also didn't commit to new protected areas or specific collaborative processes with Indigenous rights holders to support their land-use goals.

Instead, a guiding example should be Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation

and Mikisew Cree First Nation's landmark Tādzié-Sagow Atihk (boreal caribou) Stewardship Plan, released December 2022. This inspiring plan maps specific zones for 'Protection', 'Restoration' and 'Active Management' across four northeast Alberta caribou ranges and connected land corridors. These Treaty 8 signatory Nations seek a minimum of one-third of each caribou range to receive full protected status within 20 years, with hard limits upon land disturbance applied in the other two zones, and timely habitat restoration actions. Together these actions would achieve minimum habitat requirements for caribou recovery in 40 years, plus multiple other environmental benefits from more intact, resilient boreal forests and wetlands. There are many striking similarities between this plan and the one that BC has recently agreed to with Treaty 8 Nations. Let's see Alberta political parties commit this election to complete strong sub-regional land-use plans.

Eastern Slopes: OHVs and coal

To conserve our Eastern Slopes headwaters lands and ecosystems, sub-regional plans should constrain off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in certain areas that are incompatible with these high-impact activities. For Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park, OHV use still needs to be phased out as per the *2018 Castle Management Plan*. Crucial sub-regional planning on industrial and recreation footprint was suspended in the Livingstone and Porcupine Hills, which continue to experience significant damage to vegetation and waters. (See below for our Bighorn protection requests).

Political parties should commit to a legislated ban against future coal mining and exploration in the Eastern Slopes, because of the unacceptable impacts upon water quality and quantity, and species at risk such as westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, grizzly bear,

and woodland caribou.

Expand protected areas to 25 percent of Alberta this term, and 30 percent by 2030, including meaningful Indigenous co-development and co-management.

Why: Expanding protected areas is a key action for Alberta: to do our part to halt the human-caused crisis of animal and plant extinction, and to shift land use to uphold the constitutionally protected rights of Indigenous peoples. Currently just under 16 percent of Alberta's lands and waters are designated as permanent protected areas. Foothills, Grasslands and Parklands natural regions are drastically under-represented and need special focus. The Kunming-Montreal Framework targets were approved in December 2022 by roughly 190 countries, including Canada. These include placing at least 30 percent of the world's lands and waters under effective conservation and protection by 2030.

How: Establish interim protection for the most threatened areas, and ensure protected areas are prominent elements of sub-regional land-use planning, described above. New and existing protected areas need to elevate Indigenous leadership, culture, languages, rights, and responsibilities.

Examples in particular regions:

Grasslands — Protect the identified SSRP 'priority sub-regional planning areas' in the Milk River valley and southeast Alberta Wild Horse Plains. Both are areas of high biodiversity and intact native grassland vegetation critical to many species at risk. Our iconic greater sage-grouse need larger habitat protection areas: their numbers remain critically low, and threats continue from energy and mineral activity. Establishing Heritage Rangeland protected areas on public lands grazing leases would support responsible grazing; these

would integrate well with enhanced incentives to landowners to voluntarily protect private lands. Low-hanging fruit includes the SSRP's proposed expansions of both Twin River and One-Four Heritage Rangeland Natural Areas, re-classifying them clearly as *Heritage Rangeland*.

Eastern Slopes — Protect the Bighorn backcountry's vital North Saskatchewan River headwaters. *Wildland Park* designation, promised by Alberta in 1986, remains suitable for Bighorn's five Public Land-Use Zones of *Prime Protection* and *Critical Wildlife Zones* under the *Eastern Slopes Policy*. AWA strongly believes that motorized recreation should be excluded from those sensitive, erosion-prone slopes, wetlands, and meadows. For the eastern Kiska-Willson zone and other heavily abused off-road areas in the west country, there should be more quality front-country managed campgrounds and low-impact walking-hiking trails, with limited motorized recreation on carefully designated trails that no longer undermine recovery of species at risk such as threatened bull trout and grizzly bears.

Upper Smoky-Sheep Creek — situated west-northwest of Grande Cache, next to the Willmore Wilderness, these watersheds are primarily *Prime Protection* and *Critical Wildlife Zones*. The area, also known as E10, has had no industrial forestry tenure, but is facing pressure to be allocated for clearcuts. That should not be allowed. These steep slopes have extensive mountain goat and bighorn sheep areas, core grizzly bear habitat, and partly overlap with threatened Redrock-Prairie Creek caribou range. Sheep Creek itself supports threatened bull trout and Arctic grayling, a species of special concern. This area should be protected for its exceptional biodiversity, to contribute to the exercise of Indigenous rights, and for compatible wilderness-based recreation.

Restore a cohesive Fish and Wildlife branch under one department.

Alberta's Fish and Wildlife staff and direction have recently been fragmented between three departments. This should be reversed. We need an integrated approach for wildlife inventories, science-based hunting and fishing allocations, conserving habitat, and taking timely action to recover species at risk. Fish and wildlife staffing capacity should also be increased to enable effective monitoring and enforcement.

Modernize Alberta's archaic Wildlife Act and Forests Act to manage for habitat, ecosystems and Indigenous rights.

Alberta's *Wildlife Act* remains focused on hunting-fishing allocations. It should be modernized to include clear direction, timelines, and regulatory teeth to manage habitat to conserve biodiversity and recover species at risk.

Alberta's *Forests Act* remains focused on managing forestry clearcut allocations under an outdated sustained timber yield approach. Weak ecosystem guidelines and unsustainable logging volumes are degrading forest wetlands, waters, soils, and species diversity. It's long past time for our *Forests Act* to focus on restoring and sustaining forest ecosystems and upholding Indigenous rights, within which sustainable economic and social pursuits could occur. Needed reforms include ensuring meaningful Indigenous decision-making, insisting upon much stronger evidence-based ecological stewardship, and strengthening transparency and public consultation about forest management and forestry tenure.

Rescind the Alberta Energy Regulator's approval of Suncor Fort Hills oilsands mine's high-risk plan

for the outstanding, irrecoverable McClelland Lake wetlands.

At the edge of Alberta's mineable oilsands, in a landscape of tailings ponds and bitumen pits, the deep peatlands and clean waters of the McClelland Lake wetlands provide a safe stopover and breeding area along the major migratory bird flyway of the Lower Athabasca River. Its spectacular 'patterned fen' wetland should be protected for future generations to marvel at. Instead, Suncor intends to insert a very large underground wall and water pipeline system into the middle of that groundwater-fed fen, for many decades, to mine its upper half. AWA believes Suncor has failed to meet its regulatory requirements to have a plan that ensures the natural water flows, water chemistry and water levels will remain in the unmined half of the wetlands. Regulatory approval for the plan should be withdrawn.

Reform Alberta's weak Mine Financial Security Program (MFSP), so oil sands and coal mine operators, not citizens, pay to reclaim these sites.

MFSP needs to require oil sands and coal mine operators to post full financial security with government for their actual disturbance footprint. The current MFSP requires only token payments until 15 years before a poorly defined 'end of mine life.' AWA believes Albertans will be stuck paying tens or hundreds of billions for clean-up. Shifting to full financial security will encourage operators to minimize disturbance and undertake timely progressive reclamation.

Thank you for seeking strong conservation measures in political parties' election platforms! ♡

Fifteen Years of OHV Damage in the Bighorn Backcountry

By Sean Nichols and Phillip Meintzer



Off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails in the Bighorn backcountry are poorly designed and inappropriately located for the preservation of native species and ecosystems in the area, according to the results of long-term monitoring in the area.

In 2003, spurred on by a new management plan that — for the first time — allowed the use of OHVs in the beloved Bighorn backcountry, AWA embarked on what would become one of its longest-running research projects. The Bighorn Wildland Recreational Trail Monitoring Program (BWRMP) was

envisioned as a comprehensive monitoring program that would assess the implementation of the government's management plan by considering how well the regulations protected the sensitive ecosystems of the Bighorn. The BWRMP was launched in 2004 and ended up running for 15 years, with the



Slumping is a form of trail damage that occurs when a mass of land (i.e., dirt, clay, rocks, mud etc.) slides down a slope. This photo depicts an incident of slumping that was noticed during a trail survey in 2017. Photo © Alberta Wilderness Association.

last of the data being collected in 2019. AWA is in the process of publishing a new report on the findings of this study, but the highlights are summarized here for readers of the *Wild Lands Advocate*.

AWA focused our monitoring on the Hummingbird Area of the Upper Clearwater/Ram Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ). We chose this area because it was the largest OHV trail system established in the 2002 *Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan* (AMP). This PLUZ is located within the *Prime Protection Zone* which had been previously identified in the 1984 *Eastern Slopes Policy*, and therefore explicitly contravened the intentions of that policy by tolerating OHV recreation in the area. AWA surveyed the trail network for impacts from recreation, including direct damage to the trail and/or surrounding vegetation, impacts at water crossings, campsites, and on secondary (or non-designated trails).

During the initial survey period conducted between 2003 and 2005, we monitored approximately 76 kilometres of designated trails and found 453 sites of concern, with damaged trail sections accounting for nearly 20 percent of the surveyed trail network. Overall, we found roughly one erosion event for every 600 metres of trail within the surveyed trail network. From 2012 to 2017, we monitored roughly 96 km in total within our focus area, recording 646 instances of trail damage. The majority of this damage consisted of direct damage to the trail, braiding, the presence of secondary trails, water crossings, and stewardship attempts. The number of damage sites and total length of damaged trail increased significantly between the initial survey and the 2012 to 2017 period.

Increased precipitation events, like those that occurred in 2012 and 2013, exacerbated OHV damage by softening the soil, reducing its strength and increasing the likelihood of erosion. Given future climate change scenarios, extreme weather events — such as flash flooding from rainfall — are expected to become more frequent. This will likely mean a compounding effect of continued trail deterioration unless steps are taken

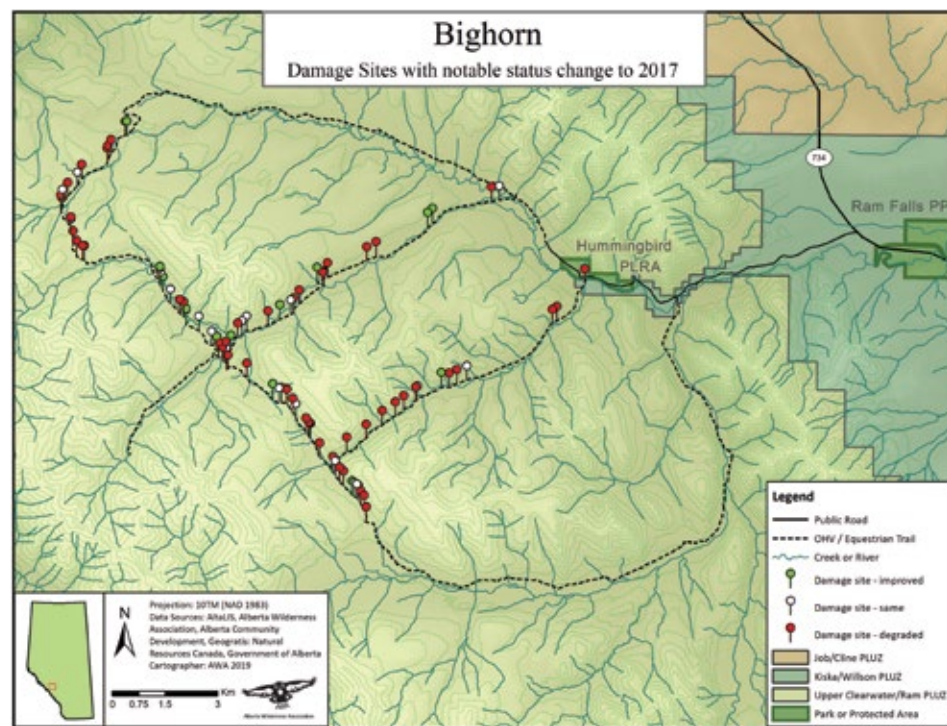
to rehabilitate existing damage and prevent future harm.

While most OHV users generally appeared to respect trail closures, there was evidence of ongoing illegal trail use, suggesting that any potential recovery was likely being inhibited. Since recovery from OHV damage can take years and trails that have been closed can continue to erode, the responsible managers should consider a more hands-on approach to restoration through the closure of trail portions and erecting physical barriers to access.

Given the evidence from the recorded data, it is clear that this landscape is unsuitable for recreational OHV use, which was foreseen by the 1984 *Eastern Slopes Policy*. Having the PLUZ regulations in place to protect the sensitive ecosystem values only works so far as those regulations are enforced, and appropriate protection and/or recovery measures are taken to maintain ecological integrity in the region — such as trail closures and site rehabilitation. The evidence clearly demonstrates that the existence of a motorized vehicle trail network is having detrimental effects on the landscape.

AWA's primary findings of this study is that the overall condition of the Bighorn's Hummingbird Area trail system has significantly declined since the initiation of our monitoring program in 2004. Comparisons across years indicate that the majority of sites surveyed have deteriorated in condition, providing concrete evidence that this area cannot tolerate continued OHV traffic while maintaining ecological integrity. The two are incompatible.

The Bighorn trail network, as it stands, is inappropriately sited, inappropriately designed, and offers insufficient protection for native species. Its presence is a violation of the intent of the *Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan* and the PLUZ regulations. Allowing OHV recreation to continue at the current levels is wholly inconsistent with the vision of the *Prime Protection Zone* designation under the *Eastern Slopes Policy*. Furthermore, it is inconsistent with the views of many Albertans who wish to see this area's wilderness and natural values prioritized and protected for current and future generations. 🏔️



A map showing damaged trail sites within AWA's Bighorn study area. The colour of each marker on the map corresponds to the status change for each site over time (i.e., whether the site improved in condition, remained the same, or degraded). Map © Alberta Wilderness Association.

Alberta Forestry Decisions: A Roadblock to Caribou Recovery?



By Gillian Steward

Shane Ramstead received a letter in the mail in August 2021, he couldn't quite believe what he was reading. Alberta Forestry had approved a plan by West Fraser Timber to clear cut 3400 hectares in west central Alberta south of Grande Cache. Land that included the already depleted home range of the endangered A La Peche caribou herd.

"I was disappointed, shocked, dismayed...frustrated," said Ramstead, a retired Alberta Fish and Wildlife Officer.

Ramstead knew the government had established a caribou task force for the Berland sub-region — where the clear cutting would take place — to determine how best to preserve A La Peche and neighbouring Little Smoky caribou habitat so those two populations have a

better chance of surviving and hopefully thriving. But that task force had barely started its work at the time of this announcement from West Fraser.

"We knew that there was planning going on in some of these areas. But not to the extent that they were gonna actually go in pre-caribou plan and take all the remaining timber. So it was like they were just quickly trying to slide it



A La Peche caribou during autumn migration across Shane Ramstead and Darcy Handy's Berland area trapline. Photo © D. Handy.

in,” said Ramstead as he surveyed the vast forested hills in the area near Moon Creek, which has some of the oldest and most intact tree stands in the region, including trees over 100 years old.

West Fraser, a publicly traded company, is the largest softwood lumber producer in North America. Jim Pattison, the well-known billionaire from British Columbia, owns ten percent.

Ramstead and his trapping partner Darcy Handy, a retired dentist, immediately took action. They notified several environmental organizations (ENGOS) — The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) — as well as The Mountain Métis (a community in the area), other like-minded people, and the news media in order to bring the situation to public attention.

In the end Alberta Forestry backed down and ordered a delay until the caribou task forces established by Alberta Environment had completed their work and government had followed through with decisions about caribou habitat restoration.

Ramstead received that ominous letter because he has a trap line in the Berland region; trappers must be notified of industrial plans so they can access their trails and move their traps and other equipment out of harm’s way. But there is no such requirement for Alberta forestry or timber companies to consult widely with the general public in the area. Without Ramstead and Handy sounding the alarm, the first stage of the logging project might have been completed over the winter of 2021-22.

“It really, really points out that they can make a decision like that without really publicly consulting the people in the area ... that doesn’t seem right,” said Ramstead who was named North American Wildlife Officer of the year in 2017 by the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association.

Lack of Transparency

Brenda Heelan-Powell of the Edmonton-based Environmental Law Centre also has some concerns with the lack of consultation and transparency

required of forestry companies by the *Alberta Forests Act*, an issue which dates back to the early 1970s.

Consultation should begin, she said over a coffee in Calgary, with the Forest Management Agreements (FMAs) by which the provincial government gives timber companies the rights to a swath of land and the trees on it for a period of 20 years.

“Consultation should happen before the government grants rights to a third party,” she said. “There should be some discussion as to whether it’s appropriate so concerns can be dealt with right off the bat. If you are granting an FMA and you have public consultation around it, it might become apparent very quickly that this area over here includes caribou range, so let’s not grant the FMA.”

Forest Management Planning guidelines stipulate that timber companies should undertake consultation but there are no specifics about how that consultation should be carried out, Heelan-Powell said. Some companies hold open houses to explain their plans but that process only reaches the people who are able to attend.

The March 2022 Forest Management Agreement Decision Policy is somewhat clearer when it comes to Indigenous communities: FMA holders “may defer” harvesting in areas that are of cultural significance to Indigenous communities and “agree to engage in enhanced consultation with Indigenous communities with an objective of better understanding and protecting areas that are important for the exercise of the rights of Indigenous peoples.”

In the past three decades those rights have been spelled out in court decisions across the country which compel consultation, accommodation or compensation for Indigenous communities impacted by industrial development. But the *Alberta Forests Act* doesn’t compel consultation or accommodation for Indigenous communities or any other affected party even though the FMAs turn over rights to huge swaths of land for 20 years or more if they are renewed, which is usually the case.

After the FMA is approved there are other steps along the way — a forest management plan that sets Annual Allowable Cut, a spatial harvesting sequence plan that covers a ten-year period, a five-year rolling General Development Plan, and a compartment-specific Forest Harvest Plan which extends for one to five years.

That was the stage when Shane Ramstead received the letter informing him of West Fraser’s plans to clear cut old growth forest on land that included caribou range. It was the first time he had heard of such detailed plans. But he wasn’t being asked for his opinion; he was being told it was a done deal.

Ramstead had concerns about caribou. Indigenous people in the area worry about how harvesting plans may affect their water sources. Landon Delorme of the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation points to an area on Mount Louis and wonders about safeguards for lands that sustain their nearby rivers and lakes.

According to a CPAWS report, West Fraser’s plans meant the last undisturbed pieces of the A La Peche caribou winter range that was already 88 percent disturbed by human activity would be clear cut, destroying old growth forest that caribou depend on for protection and food. Recent estimates put the Little Smoky population at 110; the A La Peche population is at least 100.

Communications officials at West Fraser were contacted twice by email and asked about their consultation practices particularly as they applied to the Moon Creek plan. They did not respond.

Heelan-Powell said that recent regulatory changes note that caribou range plans may require companies to alter their original plans for timber harvesting. Since no caribou range plan has been completed for the Berland region, getting into the area early means fewer restrictions.

There is another complication: the caribou task forces were established by Alberta Environment and Parks (now Environment and Protected Areas), but decisions about timber harvesting are made in a separate ministry — Alberta Forestry, Parks and Tourism.



A La Peche caribou during autumn migration across Shane Ramstead and Darcy Handy's Berland area trapline.
Photo © D. Handy.

Alberta Forestry is primarily focused on generating revenue from timber operations; Alberta Environment is responsible for protecting wilderness and wildlife habitat. How the ministries exercise those conflicting mandates often depends on which ministry has more influence in Cabinet.

Challenges by Timber Companies

Caribou task forces for west central Alberta were established by the provincial government after it entered into an agreement with the federal government to preserve caribou habitat or be faced with a federal habitat protection order. The task forces are made up of representatives of Indigenous rights holders and various stakeholders such as forestry and petroleum companies, municipalities, ENGOs, tourism operators, and trappers who are tasked with developing recommendations for a sub-regional land-use plan.

The Upper Smoky Task Force focused on a sub-region adjacent to Berland and forwarded recommendations to Alberta Environment in 2020. The government promised an enforceable Upper Smoky land-use plan by the end of 2022, but the recommendations have not yet been made public because they are still under discussion. The Berland Task Force has yet to forward its set of recommendations.

These delays have given forestry companies a certain amount of leeway when it comes to harvesting plans that might

include caribou range. And given the lack of consultation and transparency about those plans, caribou range could easily be clear cut before concerned stakeholders or the general public can raise objections.

For example, in spring 2020 during the months prior to the agreement between Alberta and the federal government, Alberta Forestry approved the 10-year Forest Management Plan proposed by forestry giant Weyerhaeuser which allowed the company to harvest 550,000 cubic metres of coniferous forests on Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway caribou ranges each year — almost half of the annual allowable cut for Weyerhaeuser Grande Prairie.

Weyerhaeuser held an open-house just outside Grande Prairie during which it presented its plan and took questions from those in attendance. But there was no requirement for the company to accommodate concerns of those who attended or for further consultation.

A month after the Weyerhaeuser plan was approved the Alberta Forest Products Association presented Devin Dreeshen, the cabinet minister responsible for forestry, with a report that recommended opening up parks and protected areas in order to increase the forest land base available for harvest. A week later, on May 4, Dreeshen announced that the forestry industry's annual allowable cut would increase by up to 13 percent. The AFPA report was not publicly available and there were no public consultations beforehand, simply a media release announcing the minister's decision.

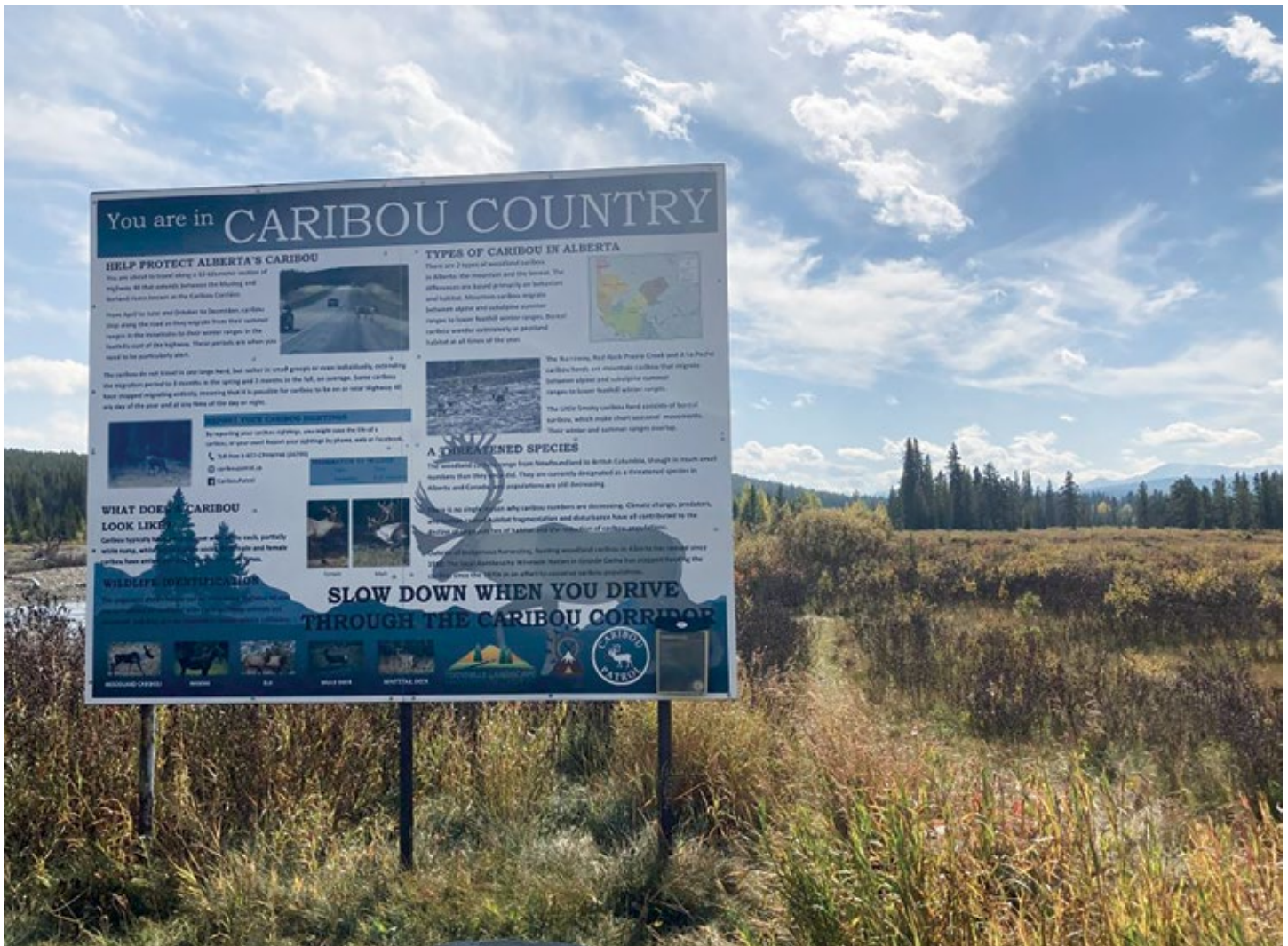
In 2019 Alberta Newsprint Company (ANC), a joint venture of West Fraser Newsprint Ltd and Whitecourt Newsprint Company that was created to develop and operate a newspaper mill in Whitecourt, went to court after it was ordered by the Minister of Forestry and Agriculture to harvest less timber on caribou range than had been agreed to in an earlier Forest Management Agreement. ANC Timber claimed the order was invalid because it breached the contract. The court sided with the government and refused the request to delay the order.

Forestry Employment

In 2013, Whitecourt, a town of about 10,000 people 160 kilometres northwest of Edmonton was named The Forestry Capital of Canada for that year by the Canadian Institute of Forestry, an industry lobby group. It's easy to see why. Whitecourt is home to two lumber mills, a pulp mill, and a pulp and paper business. The lumber mills are operated by West Fraser and Canfor; the pulp mill is owned by Canfor; ANC owns the pulp and paper operation.

Other towns in west central Alberta — Hinton, Edson, Rocky Mountain House — are also home to forestry operations. Grande Cache relies on the local Foothills Forest Products sawmill owned by Dunkley Lumber for some employment, as well as coal mines and oil and gas infrastructure. According to government documents, about 18,000 people are directly employed by Alberta's forestry industry. The provincial treasury garners about \$100 million a year in timber royalties. The industry contributes \$2.9 billion annually to Alberta's GDP.

According to a 2016 mediator's report on the dilemma presented by caribou habitat restoration and the interests of forestry industry, companies operating in west central Alberta are highly interdependent; exchanging wood fibre in various forms to enable efficient operation of sawmills and pulp mills, and other facilities including biomass power generation and composite wood products. These companies are all greatly dependent on wood allocations under various forms of tenure that originate in and around the Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou ranges. The mediator recommended that all significant harvesting



Caribou Country Contradictions – Clearcuts were temporarily averted on some of the forested slopes within threatened caribou home ranges that are visible behind the Highway 40 caribou patrol traffic cautions. Photo © Alberta Wilderness Association.

by Canfor and West Fraser in west central Alberta be conducted outside caribou ranges for the next five years (until 2021), but that recommendation was not implemented by Alberta Forestry.

Looking to the Future

When it comes to caribou, the mandates from Alberta Environment and Alberta Forestry seem to be completely at odds. Under the auspices of Alberta Environment, wildlife officers organize an annual cull of wolves by shooting them from helicopters because they have become such a threat to caribou. But over in Alberta Forestry timber companies are given permission to clear cut on caribou ranges even though that makes it easier for wolves to prey on caribou.

Brenda Heelan Powell of the Environmental Law Centre said that while the term “sustainable forestry” gets used a

lot by timber companies, government, and some ENGOS it would be more accurate to call Alberta’s approach to forestry “sustainable timber.”

“When I look at the legislation, the regulations, the bulk of the guidelines, to me it is about sustainable timber. We don’t want to cut down so many trees that none are left. There’s a big focus on reforestation and making sure when we cut here today, we replant so there will be more timber supply in the future,” said Heelan-Powell.

It is time to modernize our legislation, she added, and move from regulation of the forestry industry designed to ensure a sustainable supply of timber to ecosystem-based management of our forests. That would allow forests to be managed for a multitude of values rather than just timber. It could also mean more community involvement, monitoring and transparency.

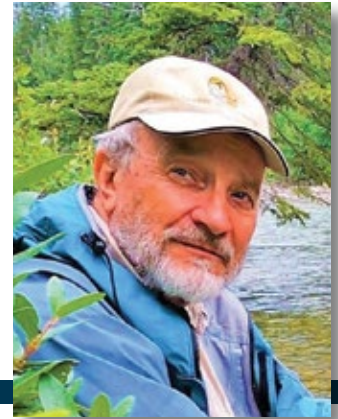
In the meantime, caribou habitat is rapidly disappearing, and the caribou population is dwindling. Local residents like Shane Ramstead, the trapper and former fish and wildlife officer, are pleased that their publicity campaign put a stop to plans to harvest on caribou range. But they also know the fight is not over.

“If we had not done anything, if we had not pursued it, we had not contacted other people nothing would’ve been done. No one would’ve known the difference. All that would’ve been logged over, halfway done already, and no one would’ve been the wiser,” said Ramstead.

As Ramstead well knows from his years of work on the land, Alberta’s forests are important for all sorts of reasons, not just timber revenue. For caribou they are essential to their survival. 🐾

Fixing a Broken Species: Challenges in the Recovery of Westslope Cutthroat Trout

By Lorne Fitch



My grandfather's pocket watch lies heavy in my palm. On the back, arrayed against the silver of the case, is an embossed golden horseshoe. That horseshoe, slightly raised, is worn nearly through, maybe like the luck it used to imply. Time and luck have both run out for the watch since it is broken and no longer repairable.

Similar to my grandfather's watch, time has run out for some of the few remaining westslope cutthroat trout populations, and it is rapidly running out for others. Threatened is the current term used to express their official status in Alberta. Maybe "extinguished" would be appropriate for some streams. Cutthroat trout are now absent from 94 percent of their historic range. Once there were more cutthroat trout than people in Alberta; now we vastly outnumber the remaining genetically pure fish — those few remaining individuals free from hybridization with introduced species.

Recovery goals, created both provincially and federally, include protecting and expanding the current range of genetically pure populations. Pure is defined as a percentage of genetic material that is true to type, greater, or equal to 99 percent. In other words, the real, unadulterated trout, not mixed with non-native rainbow trout genes. Hybridization with rainbow trout is a particularly vexing problem that started when we began stocking our lakes, rivers, and streams with non-native species for the sake of sportfishing. The evolutionary fate of hybridized populations is unknown, as yet, because it is a paradox; the effect of genetic mixing is believed to reduce fitness, yet despite that belief, hybridization has progressed rapidly.

Photo: Cutthroat trout- Myles Radford

Caption: West slope cutthroat trout (pictured) were once abundant across southwest Alberta but are now absent from 94 percent of their historic range. Photo © M. Radford.

Michael Sullivan, a provincial fish scientist with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, describes the three horsemen of fisheries apocalypse as "harvest, habitat, and hybridization." Cutthroat trout were easy to catch; too easy. Their declines led to the thought that stocking was necessary and non-native rainbow trout and other trout species were poured into cutthroat waters. Successive waves of industrial, agricultural, and recreational land uses have washed over most of the watersheds containing cutthroat trout. The number of intact watersheds — road free, uncut, and undeveloped — have shrunk like ice cubes on a hot stove. Against this backdrop, provincial fisheries biologists, national parks biologists, conservation groups, and independent biologists are working together on a quest to fix a broken species. A species which we broke.

The first major challenge was an inventory of cutthroat trout populations, with genetic analysis to determine the degree of purity. This was no small task, and information on overlooked populations is still trickling in. Like stock-taking in a store, the inventory of cutthroat trout provided the information to determine status, a prelude to listing it as a species at risk. This is also crucial to development of a recovery strategy. Where cutthroat trout are currently found is vastly outweighed by areas where they are now missing — that fact alone should be providing a sense of urgency for their recovery.

If that task wasn't daunting enough, the next steps for recovery make the work of

the basic inventory pale by comparison. It will be critically important to grow the pure population of cutthroat, in as many places as feasible, as quickly as possible, while ensuring existing populations are protected from peril.

So how does one grow a fish population? Unfortunately, there is no cutthroat trout store available to get more. Range expansion is possible when pure trout are moved into a few barren waters upstream of waterfalls. This is population insurance but does not meet a full recovery goal. A primary recovery goal is to return them to much of their previous range, where many streams are now occupied with hybridized trout.

To repopulate those streams requires an abundant supply of pure cutthroat trout and the strategy involves the development of a hatchery broodstock. As David Mayhood, a fisheries researcher with considerable experience with the species, points out, "Westslope cutthroat trout have developed many unique evolutionary nuances throughout their range." This constitutes a resource of genetic and life history diversity.

Creating a brood stock has to respect this feature of the species, as Andreas Luek, a senior fisheries biologist, explained. The inventory of cutthroat waters provided a place to start. The upper Oldman River watershed had connected populations and the best opportunities to tap for broodstock development. Find some spawning cutthroat trout, capture them, strip, and fertilize the eggs, and presto — a brood stock in the making. If only it was that simple.

Cutthroat trout are spring spawners — a time of snowmelt, rainfall, flooding, and often turbid water conditions. Knowing trout are present in a stream is one thing;



West slope cutthroat trout (pictured) were once abundant across southwest Alberta but are now absent from 94 percent of their historic range. Photo © M. Radford.

finding them in a narrow window of time while they are spawning is another. If a needle in a haystack is a challenge to find, imagine the situation faced by fishery biologists with cutthroat trout.

Trout populations in tiny tributaries of the upper Oldman River are small and it is unwise to remove too much of the reproductive potential. One can't rob Peter to pay Paul, so trout eggs from a number of tributaries are amalgamated into the formation of a "composite" broodstock. This required additional genetic testing to determine if all were of pure derivation, ensuring the various populations to be mixed were connected, sharing similar traits, and the individuals were disease-free.

A coordinated effort, spread over several seasons, required up to 12 teams to locate, capture, and secure eggs. This will continue for several more years until a large enough broodstock is assembled for eventual return to streams.

Return of the progeny of broodstock to streams will be done with a technique called remote site incubation, or RSI. The eggs of pure cutthroat trout, from the wild or broodstock, are allowed to develop in a hatchery facility and then are placed into instream RSI units to hatch. The fry then swim out of the units into the stream. As Brian Meagher, the provincial fisheries

biologist who has tested the technique, says, "This gives these trout an almost immediate head start in the stream where they will spend their lives." The technique seems to provide a substantial improvement in survival, over nature, almost quadrupling the number of trout that will swim into a new life.

The next steps, like where to put the progeny of the broodstock, have yet to be worked out, but are the most critical in terms of recovery goals. Multiple, overlapping, and sometimes opposing issues arise. Given these challenges, it would be good to take a moment to appreciate the task fisheries biologists have in recovery efforts for cutthroat trout.

Challenges in population restoration include determining what is the critical population size to be able to survive upsets and persist over the long term. Is there capacity in the hatchery for broodstock and for quarantining eggs? The RSI techniques will need to be scaled up to match population recovery goals.

Then will come the thorny question, how to deal with hybridized populations? Can they be swamped with pure-strain fish and slowly improve the genetics? Will some systems require the removal of hybrids before the stocking of pure trout occurs? How will this be achieved? Will it require

the use of rotenone, a fish poison, or can it be done with electrofishing? What will be the public receptivity to the use of rotenone and what engagement will be required with stakeholders?

Where it will be impossible to completely remove hybrids, can barriers to upstream movement be installed, to separate populations? What is the overlap with bull trout populations (also Threatened) and recovery actions for that species? How will other species like mountain whitefish be affected?

How will anglers react to temporary losses of angling opportunity and what angling regulations will be required to protect pure populations? How can public and political support be maintained over the long period of time required for recovery efforts?

Habitat restoration of damaged and degraded stream sections will be required as well as work at a watershed scale. Where are the best possibilities for restoration, what is required to accomplish this, and what will this cost? Who will undertake these herculean tasks? Should this have started long before now?

Multiple cumulative effects assessments done in cutthroat watersheds tell a similar and graphic tale — the future of cutthroat (and other native trout) persistence is at risk because of the land-use footprint, which is large and growing. That is the elephant in the room (or in the watershed). Habitat issues from land use are interlinked and cannot be separated from those of harvest and hybridization. Dealing with the fires of harvest and hybridization, getting them under control is essential. Failure to grapple with land use will potentially compromise all the other efforts.

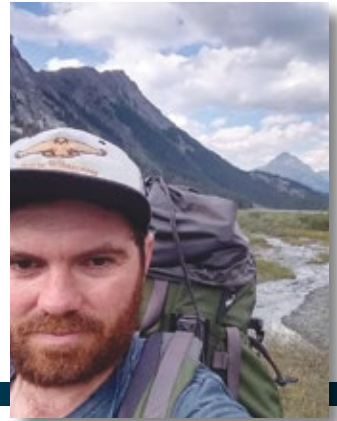
The biggest challenge is to ensure that westslope cutthroat trout population recovery proceeds at a pace faster than losses and that habitats are secured and protected before they disappear. If that doesn't happen, the fate of the species will mirror my grandfather's pocket watch — the hands frozen in place when the time ran out for repairs.

Lorne Fitch is a Professional Biologist, a retired Fish and Wildlife Biologist and a former Adjunct Professor with the University of Calgary. 🍓

Four Years On:

A Review of Provincial Environmental Policies Since 2019

By Nathaniel Schmidt



Alberta, like all Canadian provinces and territories, has some tough environmental reckoning to do in the face of climate change and biodiversity collapse. Laws, regulations, and policies implemented at all levels of government are crucial to leading our response and addressing these complicated issues. With a provincial election expected this coming May, now is the time to review and assess where four years of UCP leadership has left the state of environmental decision-making in Alberta and look forward towards the tools that are needed to properly address these complex issues. Their tenure began with the passing of numerous laws and shifts in regulation and policy characterized by the easing of government oversight, prioritizing land use over planning and protection, and prioritizing private interest groups.

The most familiar may be the proposed changes to Alberta Parks that would have seen large-scale delisting of areas from the parks system and the widespread downloading of parks management responsibilities to private partnerships. This saw strong opposition from all corners of Alberta, resulting in a reversal from the provincial government. The Kananaskis Conservation Pass which instated a user fee for park users also galvanized opposition among many in southern Alberta. Both received widespread media attention driven by an outcry over what Albertans saw as an attack on our universal public goods — which are becoming increasingly rare in the neoliberal push towards privatization.

Both initiatives were ambiguous in their implementation and long-term effects. In the case of parks, we were assured that despite 175 areas being removed from the parks system, they would remain protected.

However, assurances are not legally binding, and it was unclear what the long-term effects of these removals and reversion to unprotected Crown land would mean. Meanwhile, it was also unclear how the funds from the Kananaskis Conservation Pass would be used. This remains a question mark more than a year and a half since its implementation in June 2021.

Other new laws also lacked clarity, leading to questions about their true purpose and effects, showing a trend in UCP's approach. The *Trails Act* is a good example. On the surface, the government introduced the Act, stating that it was an improvement to the recreational trails system in Alberta. However, as professor Shaun Fluker noted in his ABLawg (the University of Calgary Faculty of Law Blog) analysis of the Act, the *Trails Act* is “another example of ‘framework legislation’: A statute that consists almost entirely of permissive statements which authorize a minister or other member of the executive branch to enact all the substantive legal rules sometime later outside of the legislative process.”

The Red Tape Reduction initiative is a similar example of this concentration of power in the executive branch. Bill 21, the *Red Tape Reduction Act*, was touted as legislation that would improve regulatory efficiency and save Albertans money. But hidden behind this cost-savings maneuver was a shift in how our public lands are managed and how this management is communicated to the public. Section 1.1(1) of the Act allows the Minister to adopt rules “without limitation” and without any responsibility to bring amendments to the Lieutenant Governor and have them published in the Alberta Queen's Printer with notices on ministerial websites. This

already ineffective process has now been made even weaker.

Results of this are already being seen with the release of the *Provincial Parks General Directive* in September 2022. This made changes to things like the use of dogs for hunting and bear baiting. Most concerning, however, was that it was done with almost no scrutiny thanks to minimal or non-existent requirements for consultation and public announcements.

These actions erode transparency in environmental decision-making and gradually dismantle the system that is supposed to treat our natural assets as a public good. We saw the impacts of this ideology in action during the pandemic when the Alberta government suspended environmental reporting requirements for industry in 2020, justified by emergency powers related to COVID-19.

The decision to scrap the *Coal Policy* without warning or consultation was a similar move that, like the proposed changes to Provincial Parks, came back to haunt the UCP government.

The *Trails Act* and *Red Tape Reduction Act* will make it easier for future governments to make these kinds of sweeping changes with limited scrutiny in the crucial period before they come into effect. Should this approach be duplicated by emboldened future governments, we can only expect more surprising shifts in law, regulation and policy to fall further under the radar.

The last four years also saw shifts in forestry management that prioritized industry interests. AWA has followed this issue closely and it is deserving of increased scrutiny. The passage of Bill 40 *Growing Alberta's Forest Sector Amendment Act*, 2020 was touted as a “modernization” of

the *Forests Act*. However, its most notable amendment was a 13 percent increase to Alberta's annual timber take. The government overview of Bill 40 focuses entirely on effects to industry, stating that "We work hard and carefully to ensure our legislation balances the forest sector's success and growth." It also appears that industry was the only stakeholder engaged in the amendment process, making this outcome predictable and once more focusing on resource extraction over protection, in favour of private interests.

As the UCP's term in government progressed, they began to follow through on their promise to stand up to the federal government in the form of opposition to what they perceived as being federal overreach with regards to environmental laws and regulations. The government has devoted significant time, energy and resources to this fight especially under Premier Danielle Smith's new leadership. But this fight has also sapped the energy of others, energy that could be used more productively to enhance cooperation on shared goals such as the protection of species and ecosystems.

Efforts began with a legal challenge to the federal carbon tax, in the form of a legal reference to the Alberta Court of Appeal which was appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Legal references allow governments to raise questions with the courts beyond those arising from traditional disputes between parties. The constitutionality of the Carbon Tax was assessed by legal experts in the judiciary and the Supreme Court of Canada ultimately upheld the regime as constitutional. An upcoming challenge to the Federal *Impact Assessment Act* has also been brought to the courts for reference and will follow the same process as the Carbon Tax Reference.

Unsatisfied with these steps, the *Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act* (better known as the Sovereignty Act) was introduced, which intends to turn established processes on their head by giving the provincial cabinet the power to assess and reject federal laws they consider unconstitutional. This encroaches on the domain of the judicial branch to assess the constitutionality of laws and breaks

down the important separation of the three branches of power (judiciary, executive and legislative). Furthermore, it gives extraordinary power to people who may lack the subject-matter expertise to adequately assess constitutionality in a legal context.

Previous attempts to resist federal laws — as we saw with the carbon tax reference — regardless of its content, went through established norms and legal processes. In contrast, the Sovereignty Act takes us into uncharted waters, and should it ever be used, will set a dangerous precedent for future conflict between different levels of government and the rule of law. It further circumvents the important roles played by the three branches of power (legislative, executive, and judicial) and the systems of accountability they provide throughout the process of the creation and implementation of laws.

Looking ahead to the upcoming election, it is important to assess what issues we need to make headway on, such as species at risk, climate change and habitat destruction. Alberta is in need of scientifically informed legislation that takes into account a broader range of interests and priorities accounting for the urgency and complexity of the problems before us.

Like almost every province and territory in Canada, Alberta lacks legislation aimed at protecting species at risk. The Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development, appointed through the federal Auditor General, recently reported that there is insufficient reporting, monitoring and enforcement for species at risk across Canada. The federal *Species at Risk Act* is limited and can only provide protection for species on provincial Crown land in very specific circumstances. To ensure the survival of species like caribou, we need laws that enable meaningful action on provincial lands.

The *Water Act* is in need of reform to better integrate improved knowledge about water ecology into the process for approvals. As the Environmental Law Centre in Edmonton noted, tools in the Act for setting water conservation objectives have seen minimal use and meaningful reforms need to be made to integrate effective tools to address environmental risks. This could have broad positive results for aquatic

ecosystems and the surrounding ecosystems and species that rely on them.

Compared to other jurisdictions across Canada and the rest of the world, Alberta is lacking any formal commitment towards reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, in line with Canada's international commitments (i.e., Paris 2015) to achieve 40-45 percent reductions by 2030 and net-zero by 2050. In conjunction with a formal commitment of this sort, Alberta needs to implement a suite of supportive policies and regulations that enable (or enforce — if necessary) corporations, industries, and Albertans to transition to a lower carbon economy and lifestyle.

Finally, it is time to prioritize the completion of regional land-use plans through the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. These plans have the potential to be a crucial tool in environmental management and to-date only the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and South Saskatchewan Regional Plan have been completed. The North Saskatchewan Regional Plan was initiated in 2014 but still needs to be completed while the remaining four plans have yet to begin. These land-use plans need to incorporate considerations for the cumulative impacts of all activities taking place across Alberta's landscape, to ensure that future development occurs in a way that minimizes harm to the environment as well as Indigenous communities across the province.

There is much that needs to be done to make up for the regression we have witnessed over the last four years with respect to environmental policies in Alberta. There is more than one way to address the environmental issues that we currently face, but from the available evidence, it seems clear that the policies and proposals over the past four years of government have not intended to remedy these issues. The blame doesn't solely rest at the feet of the UCP, as prior governments have played a role in exacerbating the dire situation facing Alberta's ecosystems, and any attempt at recovery will require greater political cooperation than we have seen in recent decades. Regardless of which party wins in the upcoming elections, we hope to see these concerns addressed, as it is well past time for our province's leadership to start prioritizing wilderness and wildlife. 🐾

Conservation of the Cardinal Divide

By Devon Earl, Kristen Andersen, Beth MacCallum,
with support from Elisabeth Beaubien and
Tara Russell



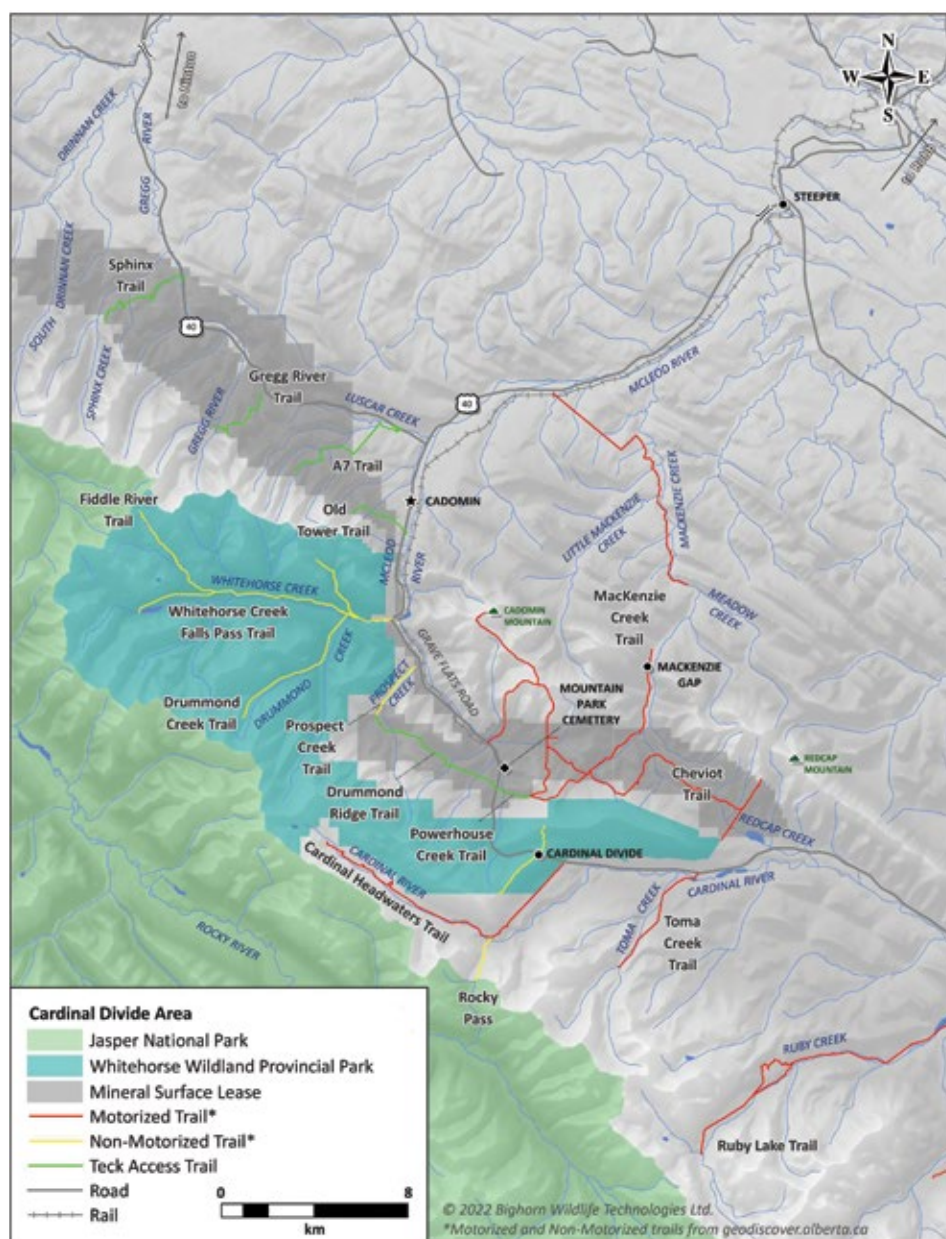
Introducing the Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition

South of Hinton, near the eastern border of Jasper National Park, lies the dividing point between two major watersheds: the Athabasca River to the north, and the North Saskatchewan River to the east. This wide ridge — known as the Cardinal Divide — boasts unique and rare flora. It is suggested that it may have escaped the last Wisconsin Ice Age as a glacial refugia, where some species were able to persist while the surrounding region was blanketed by a thick sheet of ice. Observers have recorded over 250 plant species, and a wide variety of wildlife thrives in the area including grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, bull trout, golden eagles, and harlequin ducks. The Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park protects a small portion (175 square kilometres) of the area, while the surrounding public lands are still subject to exploitation by industry and high-impact motorized recreation.

A September 2018 article by AWA Conservation Specialist Nissa Petterson in the *Wild Lands Advocate* discussed this exceptional area, and it is worthy of revisiting today, as a reminder of its significant ecological values, and to provide an update on the ongoing conservation efforts by the individuals and organizations that steward the area. In 2021, a group of people came together to discuss conservation of the Cardinal Divide and surrounding region. We call ourselves the Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition, and our members include Tara Russell (CPAWS Northern Alberta), Dr. Elisabeth Beaubien (University of Alberta), Kristen Andersen (Alberta Native Plant Council), Beth MacCallum

(Professional Biologist), and Devon Earl (AWA). This group came together over shared passions for the protection of the region; Elisabeth, Kristen, and Beth have

many years of experience enjoying and stewarding the land, and have extensive knowledge of the unique issues that the area has faced over time. Together, our goal is the



A map of the Cardinal Divide area and associated trails. Map © Bighorn Wildlife Technologies.

responsible conservation of this ecologically important area for its inherent value and for the enjoyment of generations to come.

Biodiversity, Whitehorse Wildland Park, and KBAs

Of the numerous plant species that have been recorded in the area, many are rare or disjunct — meaning that they are occurring in isolation from the typical range of their population. The area is unique and ecologically important and there is a proposal to designate a portion of the Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park as a national Key Biodiversity Area, or KBA. KBAs are a way to nationally or globally recognize and conserve areas that are important for a threatened species or its habitat. In the case of Whitehorse Wildland, the species that triggered the KBA proposal are Porsild's bryum moss (*Haplodontium macrocarpum*), little brown myotis bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), and northern myotis bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*). According to the KBA proposal, Whitehorse Wildland contains 65 percent of the Canadian population of Porsild's bryum, which is globally imperilled, listed as threatened under Schedule 1 of Canada's *Species at Risk Act*, and endangered under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. The KBA proposal boundary deviates slightly from the southern boundary of Whitehorse Wildland to include the full population of Porsild's

bryum, and to include important bat habitat. Cadomin Cave provides shelter for the two endangered bat species, and is one of the largest hibernacula in Alberta. Now that white-nose syndrome has been identified in Alberta, it is particularly important to keep these animals safe and reduce additional threats to the populations. The access to Cadomin Cave is now closed to the public to protect the sensitive habitat. These are just a few of the features that make Whitehorse Wildland and the surrounding area important to protect.

Conservation Concerns

The area that surrounds the Cardinal Divide is part of Alberta's Coal Branch, where coal mining has been ongoing since 1911. Mountain Park was the first coal mine on the western arm of the Coal Branch. The mine began development in 1911 and underground mining occurred until 1950. The Luscar Mine was the first mine to reopen in the Coal Branch in 1969 and was operational until the early 2000s when the Cheviot Mine opened. The Cheviot Mine produced metallurgical coal with open pit techniques for the most part in the same locations as the original underground operations from 2004 to 2020. In 2022, Cardinal River Operations (owned by Teck Coal Ltd.) completed the first year of a six year plan to reclaim the Cheviot Mine.

This will be followed by six more years of reclamation and infrastructure removal from the Luscar Mine. The Gregg River Mine began construction in 1981, closed in 2000, and has now been reclaimed.

The history of mining in the area has created significant environmental concerns. In particular, several creeks downstream of mining activities exhibit elevated selenium concentrations in water as well as in the tissue of fish and fish eggs. However, the lack of human presence at the reclaimed mine sites has created a unique wildlife refuge for species such as grizzly bear and bighorn sheep. Unique local climate conditions contribute to the unusually high biodiversity of the Cardinal Divide; Chinooks occur through a narrow wind corridor that passes through the area and provides an additional refuge for overwintering wildlife. Grizzly bears use these reclaimed mine sites to forage for food and as a safe haven from human-caused mortality, and some research shows that the grizzly bear population has increased in this area between 2004 and 2014.

The bighorn sheep populations using the reclaimed mine have been a source herd for the translocation of 450 sheep to recover populations in the US and Alberta since 1985. The reclaimed mine sites offer an opportunity for research, education, and interpretation given their extensive



The Cardinal Divide is a beautiful region of Alberta, uniquely home to a few rare and threatened species which make it worthy of protection and conservation efforts. Photo © C. Olson.

use by wildlife. The coalition would like to retain these benefits amidst the damaging activities of coal mining that have affected the area. Retaining this area as an important wildlife habitat will require thoughtful access management planning and restrictions of damaging forms of high-impact recreation.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in this area has already created significant scars on the landscape; rutted, eroded, and braided trails have carved up sensitive alpine areas and re-routed alpine streams. OHVs can impact wildlife behaviour, damage sensitive vegetation, and decrease water quality by increasing sediment runoff into streams. Although no designated OHV trails lead into Whitehorse Wildland, certain trails in the vicinity of the park allow motorists access to the park if they divert from the designated trail — which many do. The coalition is concerned that the current amount of trail access in the area negatively impacts the ecological values of the park and surrounding area, and would like to see the number of trails reduced, as well as limiting motorized access to well below science-based thresholds, and restricted only to areas that can withstand these pressures.

In August of 2022, a few members of the coalition attended a trails meeting hosted by Teck, the company that operates the Cheviot Coal Mine. The meeting provided an opportunity for the group to learn and engage with Teck's access management in the region. The meeting was heavily skewed

towards OHV users hoping for more trail access, and no time was allotted to discuss trail management from the perspective of preserving the environment. The coalition penned a letter to Teck in October of 2022 outlining the ecological importance of the area, and asking for critical examination of all existing and historical human access in the area.

Specifically, the group requested that:

1. The planning process for access management (re-opening of access on the Cheviot mine site) have trail uses and densities determined by environmental thresholds, and all proposed motorized trails in the access management plans be carefully evaluated for their potential impact on Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park;
2. Only non-motorized access should be permitted on the Mackenzie Creek trail to 'the gap' to support habitat and recovery for bull trout (provincially designated as *threatened*), maintain habitat for harlequin ducks (provincially designated as a species of special concern), and maintain wildlife movement through the travel corridor;
3. All current motorized access in the vicinity of Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park, within alpine areas, and within bull trout habitat is removed; and
4. Human access is carefully managed

on the reclaimed mine site to support grizzly bear habitat and recovery.

The coalition plans to engage in upcoming land-use planning for the area to push for responsible stewardship and management.

Stewardship History

Stewardship of Whitehorse Wildland Park began in 1991 by Alison Dinwoodie (recipient of AWA's 2012 Wilderness Defenders Award) in collaboration with the Alberta Native Plant Council (ANPC). Alison continued her work as steward until the past decade when this role was passed on to Kristen Andersen at the ANPC. Stewardship has involved several site visits to identify concerns, reporting to Alberta Parks, regular attendance to annual trails meetings, regular engagement with the mine and regulators involved in land-use planning, and ongoing efforts to promote education about the area's conservation value. Alison led a team of volunteer botanists to develop a book on the Wildflowers of Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park, which is available from the ANPC website.

Beth McCallum has conducted a Breeding Bird Survey along the Grave Flats Road from the Whitehorse campground up and over the Cardinal Divide to the Grave Flats since 1993. For the most part this route travels through Subalpine and Upper Foothills habitat but it does cross the Cardinal Divide and is one of the few Breeding Bird Surveys in Alberta that includes alpine habitat. Beth says it is always a pleasure to emerge from the dense coniferous forest of the Subalpine to the open and expansive alpine vistas of the Cardinal Divide. The clear song of a male mountain bluebird singing, and a flash of electric blue as he takes flight is a delightful welcome to this unique environment and always draws you back.

Building on the work that has been conducted by coalition members as well as others before us, the coalition intends to continue this important stewardship work. The Cardinal Divide is such a special place in Alberta for rare biodiversity and species at risk. Just like the other wild spaces in Alberta, responsible and thoughtful stewardship will be needed to maintain the area and its many values. 🌲



The Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition is concerned about the negative impact that off-highway vehicle use (pictured) is having on the ecological values of the park. Photo © L. Smandych.

Wilderness Watch

COP15 Update: Adoption of an International Framework on Biodiversity

A new Global Biodiversity Framework has been agreed upon, but action is still needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss before it's too late. In December, nations from around the world gathered to discuss the protection of biodiversity. COP15, commonly known as the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, was hosted in Montreal, and attended by representatives from 188 governments. The result, after extensive debate, was the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, an agreement for international actions to protect biodiversity through to 2030.

The biodiversity crisis is not a new threat. Scientists have been warning for decades that biodiversity loss is an important issue requiring immediate attention, similar to — and interlinked with — the climate crisis. The 2022 Living Planet Report by the World Wildlife Fund indicates that wildlife populations worldwide have plummeted by an average of 69 percent since 1970, driven by land-use change (i.e., habitat destruction), overexploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasive species. In addition to the inherent value of nature, biodiversity is crucial to the ecosystem functions that support the survival and wellbeing of all living species on the planet. AWA and other conservation organizations were looking to COP15 to come up with a plan to tackle this crisis and lead towards a nature-positive future, where all organisms can thrive on this planet.

The most recent Global Biodiversity Framework describes four overarching goals: 1) to maintain and restore ecosystems; 2) species and genetic diversity; 3) to sustainably manage biodiversity for present and future generations; and 4) to share the benefits of genetic resources; and to secure funding, technology and scientific

knowledge to implement the framework, especially in developing countries. These goals are further divided into 23 targets aimed at specific actions to reverse biodiversity decline.

There were many positive targets in the framework that give us hope for the recovery of biodiversity so long as meaningful action is taken to achieve them. The agreement includes an ambitious target to protect 30 percent of lands and waters globally by 2030, a significant increase from the 15.3 percent of lands and 7.5 percent of waters protected worldwide as of 2020. Another target aims to restore 30 percent of degraded lands in the same timeframe, and to manage the remaining areas to avoid losing biodiversity.

According to 2022 data, only 15.6 percent of Alberta's landscape is protected as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which means that Alberta needs to step up and do our part in protecting 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. Further, to properly protect biodiversity, these protected areas need to be representative of each of Alberta's unique natural regions. The Foothills, Grasslands, and Parkland Natural Regions are severely under-represented in Alberta's protected areas network despite their ecological importance. Alberta's Grasslands Natural Region, for example, contains over 75 percent of Alberta's species at risk and is only 1.25 percent protected. In addition to creating new protected areas, it is important that our existing protected areas are maintained, meaning harmful industrial development and high-impact forms of recreation should not be allowed, particularly in areas that are sensitive to disturbance. To properly act on the target to protect 30 percent of land by 2030, we need to move forward on protection of Alberta's lands, not backwards.

The framework also pledges to reduce

harmful subsidies and incentives by at least US \$500 billion, and US \$200 billion is to be mobilized for the implementation of biodiversity strategies and action plans. Subsidies supporting agricultural or industrial development frequently incentivize the destruction of native habitats and ecosystems. According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Alberta's subsidies to the fossil fuel industry totalled \$1.32 billion in 2020-2021, and another \$658.7 million before February 2022. In addition to contributing to climate change, these subsidies encourage development, often in forests, grasslands or other habitats important to supporting biodiversity. Reducing such subsidies is necessary to prevent the harmful effects of climate change and further development into sensitive areas.

Importantly, the agreement includes significant mention of Indigenous rights, acknowledging their role as “custodians of biodiversity” and promising that the establishment of protected areas will respect these rights. According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, Indigenous managed lands cover roughly 20 percent of Earth's land mass, but contain 80 percent of its remaining biodiversity, “a sign that Indigenous Peoples are the most effective stewards of the environment.” This trend comes as no shock when you consider that Indigenous peoples have been stewarding the land for millennia. In an Alberta context, a commitment to some form of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) at a place like Bistcho Lake would be a strong step in the right direction towards the dual goals of reconciliation and protecting biodiversity by enabling the Dene Tha' First Nation to steward their Traditional Territory.

There remain weaknesses in the framework. Several commitments made to halt and reverse biodiversity are unclear and lack numerical targets.



The Dene Tha' First Nation sent a delegation to Montreal for COP15. Matt Munson (pictured – second from the left) represented Dene Tha' as part of a panel on "Knowledge Sharing on Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas" at the Canada Pavilion. Photo © Jeremy Williams / River Voices Productions

One target addresses policy measures to "encourage and enable businesses" to monitor and report on impacts to biodiversity, although it does not make this mandatory. Many business activities increase biodiversity loss, and corporations should be held accountable for these impacts and the costs of reclamation. Stronger understanding, reporting and mitigation of industrial effects on biodiversity is important to reducing biodiversity decline. Altogether, despite the critical state of global biodiversity, the framework only aims to bring the loss of high biodiversity areas "close to zero by 2030."

The Global Biodiversity Framework can provide a guide to protecting global biodiversity, but the plan itself is not enough. How the framework is implemented will be key in determining how our future on this planet looks. The previous Aichi Biodiversity Targets (adopted in 2010) led to Canada Target 1, which stated that "By 2020, at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas and inland water, and 10 percent of marine and coastal areas of Canada are conserved through networks of protected areas and other effective area-based measures." Canada fell short of achieving this target, and no country succeeded in meeting all 20 Aichi

biodiversity targets. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is another chance to do it right, and it's imperative that we succeed this time around because nature may not be able to afford another round of botched attempts. A nature-positive future depends on us and our leaders taking responsibility to take strong, perhaps difficult and uncomfortable, actions to shift the tides. It is up to Alberta and Canada to take action to achieve these targets and protect our biodiversity both provincially and nationally.

- By Ruiping Luo and Devon Earl

AWA Concerns with the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex Operational Plan

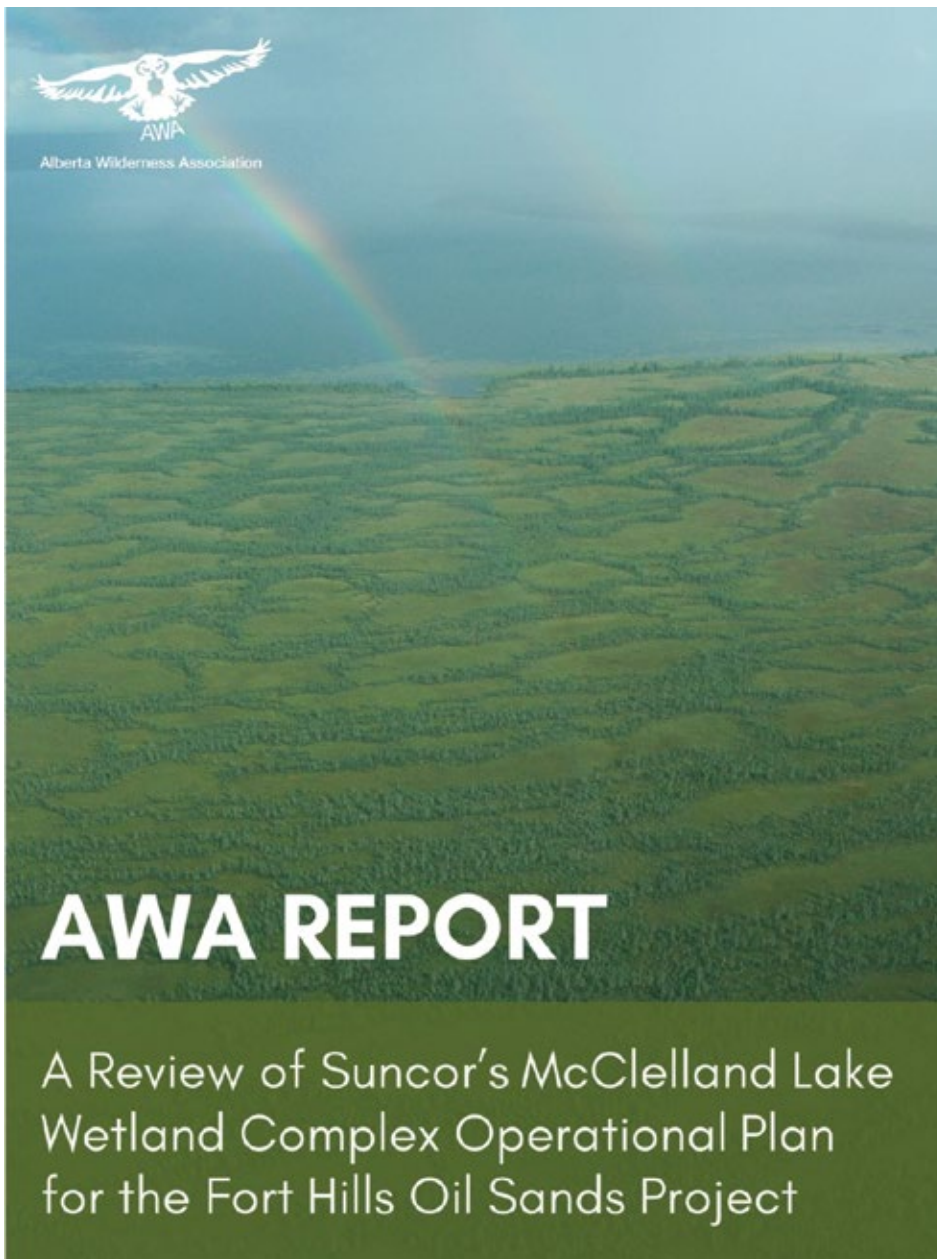
Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is asking the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) to reconsider and revoke its approval of Suncor's Operational Plan for the Fort Hills Oil Sands Project.

The Fort Hills Oil Sands Project (FHOSP) is an existing Suncor-owned oil sands mine that began operations in 2018 and is proposed to expand

mining activities into the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC) in 2025. In 1994, AWA participated in a four-year sub-regional planning process that resulted in the protection of the MLWC from oil sands development. However, after the discovery of oil reserves underneath the MLWC, the sub-regional planning rules suddenly changed in 2002 at the request of True North Energy (a subsidiary of Koch Industries), which had acquired leases for

the area in 1998 in spite of the existing protections for the area. Subsequently, the 2002 Energy and Utilities Board Decision Report permitted mining in roughly half of the wetland complex so long as the ecological integrity and functionality of the unmined portion is maintained.

The MLWC is a wetland ecosystem 90 kilometres north of Fort McMurray that includes several environmentally significant features including McClelland Lake, a large, patterned fen, and sinkhole



AWA's report (pictured) summarizes our concerns with Suncor's Operational Plan for the Fort Hills Oil Sands Project, based on the independent reviews conducted by Dr. Lorna Harris and Dr. Kelly Biagi. Report Cover © Alberta Wilderness Association. Photo © C. Wearmouth.

lakes. The area provides an important stopover point and/or breeding ground for many migratory bird species from across North America (e.g., endangered whooping cranes [*Grus americana*], rusty blackbird [*Euphagus carolinus*] and yellow rail [*Coturnicops noveboracensis*]). With respect to birds, McClelland Lake is the largest natural waterbody between Fort McMurray and the Peace-Athabasca Delta, making it an important landing place for birds in an area dominated by hazardous tailings ponds, which have been responsible for numerous bird casualties. In addition to its biophysical

properties, the area has socio-cultural importance for Indigenous communities in the region, who have relied on the MLWC as a source of drinking water, an area to harvest traditional foods and medicines, and as a place to practice and maintain their beliefs, customs, history, and languages.

According to the 2002 decision from the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, Suncor was required to submit an Operational Plan for protecting the unmined portion of the MLWC two years prior to mining within the watershed. Based on AWA's understanding of the

foundational documents intended to guide the development of this project, this Operational Plan needed to guarantee that the unmined portion of the MLWC would be unharmed by the mining, closure, and reclamation activities within the proposed mine area, otherwise the expansion into the MLWC would not be authorized. On December 15, 2021, Suncor submitted this Operational Plan to the Alberta Energy Regulator for their assessment.

At the request of AER, Suncor provided AWA with a copy of the submitted Operational Plan for us to review on January 28, 2022. AWA's intent with requesting a copy of the Operational Plan was to have an independent, third-party review of the plan conducted by experts in the disciplines of ecology, hydrology, and hydrogeology. We wanted this review to ensure that the mitigation measures proposed by Suncor within the Operational Plan would guarantee the protection of the unmined portion of the MLWC, as required by the 2002 and 2015 *Water Act* Approvals, and 2002 *EUB Decision Report* for the FHOSP to proceed with its expansion.

Over the next six months — from January to August — AWA contacted nearly 20 expert scientists, searching for researchers with specific expertise related to boreal wetland hydrology and/or peatland ecosystems. This search was time-consuming as it was difficult to find experts who did not have existing contractual ties or conflicts of interest with Suncor Energy.

In August 2022, AWA successfully contracted the independent services of two boreal wetland experts — Dr. Lorna Harris of WCS Canada and Dr. Kelly Biagi — who were willing and able to review Suncor's Operational Plan in an effort to understand Suncor's proposed mitigation plans and to determine whether any concerns had been left unaddressed, or if there were any evident deficiencies. Their review was completed on December 28, 2022. AWA will be publishing a report that details the findings of this review, but our concerns have been summarized below for readers of the *Wild Lands Advocate*.

The assessments provided by Dr. Biagi and Dr. Harris indicate that the Operational Plan contains many concerns which pose a significant risk to the sustainability of the unmined portion of the MLWC.

These concerns include:

1. Unaddressed potential saline contamination of freshwater (wetlands and groundwater);
2. Lack of modelling for potential impacts to groundwater quality;
3. Insufficient observational data for hydrological model calibration;
4. Uncertainty and risk with proposed “conceptual stage” water management plan;
5. Assumption of negligible impacts from predicted water level changes;
6. Unrecognized potential impacts to fen structure maintenance; and
7. Unrecognized impacts to peatlands and potential contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

Unfortunately, in November 2022, AWA was notified that the AER had already approved the OP via Letter of Authorization, submitted to Suncor on September 9, 2022, which seems to indicate that mining activities will be permitted within the wetland complex beginning in 2025.

AWA believes that the activities proposed within the Operational Plan may violate the conditions of the 2002 *EUB Decision Report* and 2002/2015 *Water Act* approvals. Given the concerns expressed by our expert reviewers and the high level of risk associated with the activities proposed by the Operational Plan, AWA are asking the AER to rescind their approval and for Suncor to abandon their plans to mine within the entirety of the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex.

We feel that it is important to highlight that peatlands – such as the MLWC – are critical for preventing and mitigating climate change, because they store an incredible 30 percent of all land-based carbon while only occupying three percent of Earth’s land area. Destroying peatlands not only releases stored carbon back into the atmosphere, but it also hinders our ability to capture and store those emissions in the future. Estimates from our review indicate that the minable area of the MLWC may store between 2.2 and 9.7 million tonnes of carbon, which would be released as mining activities at the FHOSP progress. Those estimates only represent the emissions produced from peat destruction and ignore any downstream emissions produced through the burning of mined petroleum by consumers. Given this

knowledge, the destruction of peatlands not only threatens Canada’s ability to meet our international climate change commitments, but the future habitability of our planet as well.

We recognize that consideration of peatland destruction was not a requirement under the approval conditions set out by the 2002 *EUB Decision Report* or the 2002 and 2015 *Water Act* approvals. However, we feel that it is important to highlight that the loss of stored carbon from destroyed or degraded peatlands will only make fighting climate change that much harder.

The full report on the findings of our expert review of the Operational Plan will be made available on the AWA website for those who are interested in learning more. Our report will be submitted to the AER for their consideration. The report will also be provided to Pete Guthrie, Alberta Minister of Energy, Sonya Savage, the Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, Steven Guilbeault, federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, as well as Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada’s federal Minister of Natural Resources.

- By Phillip Meintzer

An Update on the Foothills Solar Hearing

From January 9 to 20, 2023, a public hearing was held by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) to discuss Elemental Energy’s proposed Foothills Solar Project. The hearing provided a limited opportunity for concerned parties to express their opposition to the project, and members of the Frank Lake Concerned Citizens (FLCC), Foothills County and Frank Lake volunteer caretaker Greg Wagner participated, hoping to have their concerns heard.

As an Important Bird Area (IBA), Frank Lake is internationally acknowledged as an area significant to nesting and migrating birds. Foothills Solar GP Inc., a subsidiary of Elemental Energy

Renewables Inc., is proposing to build a 150 megawatt (MW) solar farm to the northeast of Frank Lake, with most of the project slated for construction either inside the boundaries of the IBA or within 1000 metres of the boundaries. As a member of concerned citizens group, AWA submitted concerns that the siting of the project will likely have a negative impact on Frank Lake’s bird and wildlife populations.

Foothills Solar, the applicant of the proposed solar project, continues to argue for the benefits of the project, including the reduction of Alberta’s greenhouse gas emissions that a transition to renewables will bring, and the opportunity for local employment and community benefits

arising from this project. They have formed a partnership with Cold Lake First Nations, providing economic opportunities to the Indigenous Nation. In response to concerns about the project impact on wildlife, they have indicated that the project is sited on cultivated land, which does not provide habitat for species of concern, and that there is no evidence for the Lake Effect Hypothesis — a hypothesis suggesting waterfowl may be attracted to solar panels for their similarity in appearance to water — occurring in Alberta. They have also suggested IBA boundaries to be arbitrary and have no legal protection.

While it is true that IBA boundaries offer no legal protection, IBAs are determined following internationally



The site of the proposed Foothills Solar Project, barely 1000 metres from Frank Lake and inside the boundaries of the Frank Lake IBA. Photo © R. Luo.

agreed-upon standards that are “standardized, quantitative, and scientifically defensible,” as stated by IBA Canada. Frank Lake has also recently been recognized as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), and despite the lack of legal protection, it clearly provides significant habitat for birds and wildlife. Expert testimony provided by AWA board member Cliff Wallis for FLCC during the hearing suggested that Foothills Solar has underestimated the value of cultivated land as habitat, and Mr. Wagner gave a thorough overview of the value of Frank Lake, questioning the appropriateness of building a facility known to cause bird mortality within the boundaries of this vital habitat. The construction of a solar

farm in Frank Lake IBA could jeopardize the future protection of other IBAs.

FLCC, represented by Richard Secord and Ifeoma Okoye of Ackroyd LLP, also raised concerns about dust, glare, land valuation and the infeasibility of growing trees in the dry southern Alberta climate, which had previously been suggested by Foothills Solar to screen the project. Foothills county additionally protested the use of prime agricultural land for industrial development. They suggested another plot of land to the west of the current project, although the suggested area is still within in IBA, and appears to be on native prairie, which could have higher impacts for the wildlife of Frank Lake.

Some concessions have already been

made by Foothills Solar. For instance, they have agreed to set up camera monitoring on the solar panels after construction, which will help to better understand bird behaviour near solar panels, and they have improved their mitigation strategy by using panels with white edges and partitions. Whether these new panels will significantly lower bird mortality is uncertain at this time.

The Alberta Utilities Commission has until April 19 to reach a decision on whether the Foothills Solar Project can proceed as planned, and whether there will be any conditions should the project proceed.

- By Ruiping Luo

Three Sisters Developments: Where do things Stand?

The saga of the Three Sisters Mountain Village Properties Ltd. development in the town of Canmore is set to head into

the next stage of legal proceedings in the first half of 2023.

Alberta Wilderness Association has been watching this issue closely and supports the Town of Canmore in opposing the development. The Bow

Valley provides a crucial migration corridor for wildlife — including large predators and ungulates, such as bears and elk respectively. The Bow Valley provides a key migratory route between habitat in Banff National Park

and Kananaskis through otherwise unprotected habitat that includes urban areas, industrial developments, and major highways. The project is controversial because of its proximity to this important corridor that is already under extreme pressure from human activity and existing developments.

This all began with a renewed proposal from a group of developers for a new subdivision in southeast Canmore that had previously been given approval way back in 1992 by the National Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) as a golf resort development. The NRCB is a provincial, arms-length regulatory body responsible for reviewing projects related to Alberta's natural resources. This includes tourism and recreational projects, which is why this project fell under the NRCB umbrella when it was first proposed in 1992.

The developers submitted two Area Structure Plans (ASPs) to the Town of Canmore in 2021. Both were voted down following strong public opposition. Their decision was appealed to the Land and Property Rights Tribunal (LPRT), a quasi-judicial body responsible for making decisions about land-use planning and development. The developers successfully argued that

the Town of Canmore must approve the ASPs because they align with the original NRCB approval.

Photo: three_sisters_map

Caption: A map showing the proposed location for the Three Sisters Mountain Village developments from the Area Structure Plans that were submitted to the Town of Canmore. Map © Three Sisters Mountain Village Properties Ltd.

In October 2022, the Town of Canmore was granted the right to appeal the LPRT's decision to the Alberta Court of Appeal, providing an opportunity to argue that the decisions on both ASPs should be overturned due to errors in law. Prior to this successful leave to appeal, The NRCB and Stoney Nakoda Nations secured intervenor status that allows them to have a role in the appeal hearing. Stoney Nakoda comprises the Bears paw First Nation, the Chiniki First Nation and the Wesley (Goodstoney) First Nation which are all signatories to Treaty 7. The appeal decision is one of the last legal steps that will result in the ASPs being adopted or denied thanks to an agreement between the Town of Canmore and the developers. In that agreement, Canmore agreed not to make a further appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada should the developers win the

appeal. The developer filed a separate application in the Court of King's Bench of Alberta that would compel the Town of Canmore to adopt the ASPs and move forward with the development.

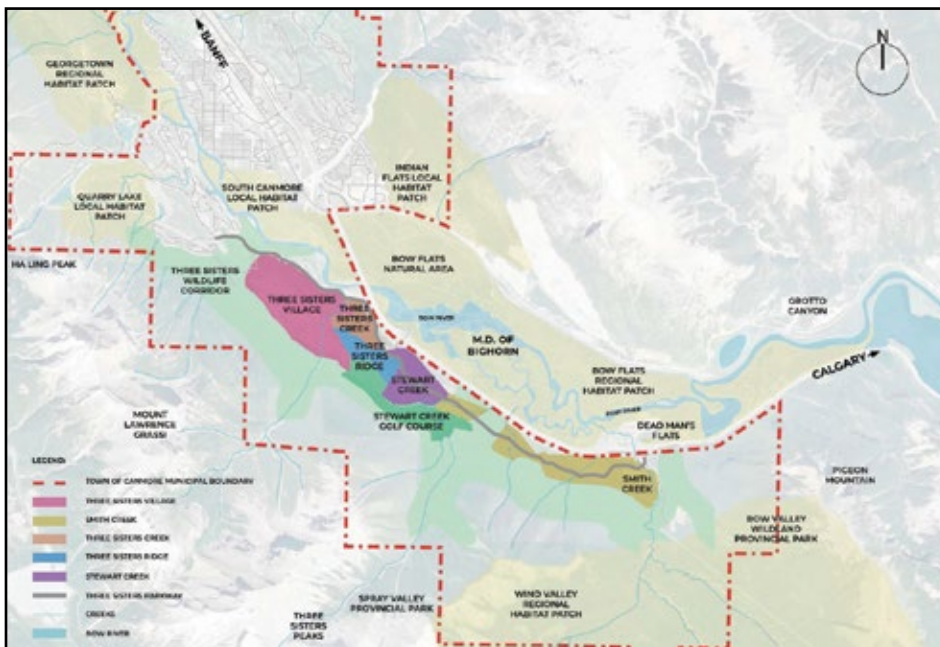
As part of their agreement, the parties have agreed to adjourn the mandamus application to await the Alberta Court of Appeal decision. The mandamus application may still commence pending the outcome of the Alberta Court of Appeal decision which has a hearing date set for April 1, 2023, while the mandamus application was previously scheduled for June 1, 2023. However, it is also possible the decision on appeal will settle the matter and make the mandamus application irrelevant.

In their arguments for intervenor status, Stoney Nakoda has raised issues of reconciliation and the honour of the Crown. The latter issue relates to Aboriginal rights and a duty to consult Indigenous groups when these rights are potentially affected. This will introduce a new legal dimension to the hearings that Stoney Nakoda argues were missing from the preceding decisions and must be considered. It will be interesting to see how this is considered by the Court of Appeal and if this contributes to their final decision.

Community opposition to the project remains strong. Groups like Bow Valley Engage have been formed to educate the public about the project and organize public opposition on the effects of the project. Bow Valley Engage also sought intervenor status for the appeal hearing but was unfortunately denied, meaning they will not play a direct role in the appeal hearing.

Ultimately, this land will remain open to development even if these ASPs are rejected because of the original NRCB approval. To reach a point where the remaining undeveloped land could be set aside as an expansion to the existing wildlife corridor, the original NRCB designation would need to be challenged.

- By Nathan Schmidt and Devon Earl



A map showing the proposed location for the Three Sisters Mountain Village developments from the Area Structure Plans that were submitted to the Town of Canmore. Map © Three Sisters Mountain Village Properties Ltd.

Departments

An Oldman Adventure

By Phillip Meintzer

The last time I had stepped foot in a canoe was more than 17 years ago. It was the spring of 2005, and I was a sprightly fourteen-year-old, going on an overnight canoe trip as part of the outdoor education program at John Ware junior high school. Since then, I haven't had much experience on the water other than my time conducting research on-board commercial fishing boats in Newfoundland and Labrador during graduate school. So, when I was invited by AWA's board president Jim Campbell to join him and his long-time friend Bob Patterson on one of their summer paddling trips, I jumped at the opportunity to get back out on the water.

Since joining AWA as a conservation specialist in May of 2021, in the middle of the ongoing pandemic, I haven't had many opportunities to get out and onto the land in the areas under my purview. I feel that this kind of firsthand experience is necessary to develop a genuine understanding of the issues facing Alberta's wilderness and to ensure that I am adequately equipped to stand up for these wild spaces in the work that is asked of me. Using this trip as an example, I wondered how anyone could claim to adequately represent Alberta's waterways and stand up for water conservation without having spent any meaningful time out on the land and experiencing the situation firsthand. This trip would provide me with an opportunity to get out of the office (and home office) for a few days and give me the chance to inspect the health of at least one river in southern Alberta to hopefully aid my work with AWA.

Our plan was to set off from the Oldman River Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) outside of Fort Macleod on the morning of Monday, July 11. We intended to travel the distance from Fort Macleod to Lethbridge over the course of two to three days depending on river conditions, and cover a total distance of approximately 100 kilometres. From the information available, this section of the Oldman River seemed to be relatively under-paddled, or at least



Bob Patterson paddles solo along the Oldman River outside of Fort Macleod on the morning of Monday July 11. The water was relatively clear and higher than expected water levels made for easy paddling.
Photo © P. Meintzer.

under-documented, which gave our trip an element of genuine adventure into uncharted territory — at least for our party of three. We departed from Calgary on the afternoon of Sunday, July 10 to camp overnight at the Oldman PRA, which would allow us to get on the water early the next morning before the heat of midday.

As part of AWA's Adventures for Wilderness initiative, this adventure was organized for several important reasons. First, to get a close up look at the state of one of southern Alberta's iconic watersheds — a watershed that is facing threats from numerous land-use pressures in the region. Second, as a fundraiser for AWA's ongoing work to protect Alberta's rivers, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable sources of clean drinking water. And finally, as a celebration of Jim's 70th birthday. Jim wanted to mark this special occasion by encouraging family and friends to donate to AWA in support of wilderness and wildlife conservation in Alberta.

Our group was greeted by the sound of birdsong under a cloudless sky on Monday morning as we woke ourselves up, packed our campsite, enjoyed a quick breakfast, and prepared the boats for our adventure. The clear sky made for a beautiful morning but served as a signal for the relentless heat and sunshine we would have to endure during our day on the water. After loading our two canoes with all of our gear, the three of us set off on our journey towards Lethbridge to explore this reach of the Oldman River.

The water level and flow of the river were better than we had anticipated, which made for quick and hazard-free paddling for most of our trip. The better-than-expected water levels also meant that we were able to cover more distance than we had planned for, cutting our travel time from three days to two. The trip ended up covering roughly 92 kilometres in total — split between 57 on Monday, and the final 35 on Tuesday. We only encountered two patches of river on the second day that gave us any sort of trouble, as we had to navigate larger standing waves obscured by the glare of the sun, but otherwise it was smooth sailing as we made our way towards Lethbridge. Under cloudless skies and amid the warmest stretch of weather we have experienced so far this summer, the conditions couldn't have been much better for two days on the water.

Having grown up in Calgary and spent many summers travelling across the southern portion of our province, I had naively assumed that I had a good understanding of the landscapes that covered this region of Alberta. I didn't realize just how wrong I was. When you're driving along the highways, all you can see — for the most part — is the endless expanse of agriculture. Fields upon fields of irrigated croplands devoid of any native biodiversity that once occupied this area. But as soon as you get on the river, down into the canyons below the fields of canola, you come to realize everything that's missing from the remainder of the landscape. You find the last refuge of that missing

biodiversity. Surrounded by impressive cliff faces with lush riparian areas, we saw plenty of wildlife. Among them were three moose (a mother with two calves), two coyotes (one swimming), numerous pelicans, threatened bank swallows and their nesting sites, bald eagles, two beavers, and a few ospreys — one even caught a fish right in front of our canoes.

The swimming coyote was a spectacular sight, as I couldn't tell what we were looking at from a distance. Initially the creature looked like just some misshapen mass that was bobbing its way across the stream. Was it a small bird, a beaver, or just a piece of debris? Once it successfully crossed the width of the river, it climbed out of the water and revealed itself in its true form, and characteristically shook itself dry from the morning swim. Having not noticed us during the crossing, it was startled by our two canoes floating past, and what happened next left me awestruck. The coyote was standing next to a vertical cliff face that I would guess was anywhere from six to eight feet tall, and upon being spooked by us onlookers, it scaled the cliff face quickly and with greater ease than I had assumed possible for a member of the canine family. An impressive and unexpected feat of agility.

One of the struggles you encounter when paddling a stretch of river with very little up-to-date information about the route is that finding an overnight campsite can be difficult. Much of the land bordering the length of the river is privately owned or part of an Indigenous reservation. This means that unless there are dedicated public campgrounds along the river, the only available option for camping is to look for an island with the appropriate topography that comfortably allows for the setup of tents. There was mention of a campsite near the hamlet of Monarch, roughly halfway between Fort Macleod and Lethbridge by way of the

river, but this was from an older guidebook and no campsite was found as we passed through the hamlet. I think we lucked out though, because instead of spending the night in a public campground, we managed to successfully find an idyllic spot to setup camp for the night on an island near the confluence of the Belly River and the Oldman. The site was a pristine sandy beach, with slow moving, clear blue water that invited us to stay put and swim. After seven and a half hours of paddling in the July heat, cooling (and cleaning) off in the river was too hard to pass up.

Thinking back to the original purpose of the trip — at least from my perspective as a conservation specialist — the three of us were pleasantly surprised with the quality and the quantity of the water for this time of year. Jim and Bob have plenty of experience paddling in different watersheds from over the years, and they had anticipated the water levels being much lower and murkier than turned out to be the case. It's hard to pinpoint the reason for this without looking at the conditions along the entire length of the river upstream from Fort Macleod including the Oldman dam and reservoir. We assumed it must have been a combination of late snow in the mountains this spring and the heavier rainfall experienced across the prairies over the past month.

If this adventure was intended to raise awareness for the precarious state of Alberta's rivers, the favourable conditions we experienced helped to shroud the dire reality of the situation. We still need to recognize that climate change will make "good" years increasingly less likely as we bounce between the extremes of intense flooding and drought. Also, just because the water conditions seemed ideal for a two-day paddle along the river, it doesn't necessarily mean that the quantity and/or quality of the water in-stream is sufficient

for meeting the needs of aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Without testing the water it's impossible to understand the state of nutrient loading from agricultural runoff or the presence of other contaminants from human activities that find their way into the watercourse. However, on the second day of paddling, we did notice the stark contrast in water quality between the Oldman River and the Saint Mary River as they merged just outside of Lethbridge. After paddling for a day and a half along relatively clear blue waters, the Saint Mary's looked more like what Jim and Bob had been expecting of our paddle, introducing murky, nearly opaque brown water into the Oldman at the outskirts of the city.

The second day of paddling passed much quicker than the first, finishing just south of Lethbridge where we pulled out along the shore at Popson Park. As with many outdoor activities, logistics are crucial to success (and safety). Thanks to longtime friend of AWA and Lethbridge resident Lorne Fitch, we connected with Kirby England, a professional biologist and environmental science instructor at Lethbridge College. Kirby generously volunteered his time, gas, and expertise to help transport us and all our gear from Lethbridge back to our cars at Fort Macleod with complimentary (and cold) beers to boot! We are grateful to both him and Lorne for their assistance and I look forward to future opportunities to connect with Kirby as it relates to the fish and water files at AWA.

This adventure was organized as a celebration of AWA President Jim Campbells 70th birthday and to raise awareness for water conservation issues in southern Alberta watersheds. Bob, Jim, and I all felt that the trip was a success, and it made us curious why more people don't paddle this portion of the river more often. Maybe we lucked out with our stream conditions and on any other year — or even later in the summer — the route would be less pleasant under drier conditions? I'm not sure. Through this adventure, we successfully raised more than \$6,000 to support AWA's ongoing efforts to advocate on behalf of Alberta's rivers and aquatic ecosystems, and I hope that we can use this money to help ensure that future generations can experience this section of the Oldman River in the same manner we were fortunate enough to experience — with clean water and healthy flows.



We camped overnight on a sandy beach near the confluence of the Belly and Oldman Rivers. The water near the campsite was clean and slow moving, and much less murky than we had expected before setting out on our trip, which made it ideal for cooling off from the summer heat. Photo © P. Meintzer.

The Calgary Justice Film Festival and Environmental Justice

By Tako Koning

Just as the Alberta Wilderness Association is a voice for the environment, so the Calgary Justice Film Festival (CJFF) strives to be a voice for social justice using the medium of film. The festival screens documentary films with the aim to create awareness and stimulate post-screening discussion with the audience on issues such as marginalized cultural or racial groups, immigration, healthcare and education, prison systems, as well as environmental topics. The film director or experts on the documentary's topic, share their knowledge during these audience discussions.

AWA's Carolyn Campbell for example, served as 'the expert voice' at the 2019 film festival following the screening of *The Whale and the Raven*, a documentary about the struggle facing the people of the Great Bear Rainforest to protect their territory and its inhabitants against the pressure and promise of the gas industry. She also moderated: *The Sacred Place Where Life Begins*, a film highlighting the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge which has been protected by the Gwich'in Nation for more than 25,000 years. This area is the birthing and nursing ground for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, on which the Gwich'in have depended for millennia and is now facing the threat of oil and gas development.

CJFF was launched in 2006 and is the only justice-themed film festival in Alberta. To generate more community engagement, a two-day Peace Fair is part of the festival. Tables are made available at no cost to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on justice issues. Film festival attendees can mingle and interact with the various NGO representatives whose advocacy ranges from building schools in South Sudan to promoting a museum for peace and reconciliation in Calgary. AWA has had a table at the Peace Fair for the past two in-person film festivals, displaying the work they are doing. Executive Director Deborah Donnelly and Sean Nichols were on hand to liaise with festival attendees.

The 17th annual Calgary Justice Film Festival took place November 18-20, 2022 at



Film directors and/or film experts share their knowledge with guests at the Calgary Justice Film Festival, such as this discussion which took place after the screening of a film at the Calgary Central Public Library in 2019. Photo © T. Koning.

the downtown Calgary Public Library and in the auditorium of River Park Church located in the Marda Loop neighbourhood. A locally produced film, *Fish Creek Beavers: Pathways to Coexistence*, was one of the environmental documentaries shown. In 2020, the Friends of Fish Creek embarked on a journey to coexist with beavers, focusing on alleviating pathway flooding caused by these 'ecosystem engineers' in Fish Creek Provincial Park. The short documentary highlights the positive and negative impacts of beaver activity on the landscape as well as the basics of simple coexistence devices such as pond levellers and culvert exclusion fences. Michael Ratliffe and the Friends of the Fish Creek Provincial Park Society produced this documentary.

The international documentary, *Stolen Fish*, was also screened last year. It focused on environmental and economic injustice in Gambia, the smallest country in Africa. Gambia's fishermen realized that their country was running out of fish due to massive overfishing ever since Chinese-operated fishmeal factories opened in the country. The fish were processed into animal feed and then exported to China and Europe. This documentary looks at the lives of three Gambian fishermen who lose their livelihoods and are forced to leave their families to look for a better life in Europe. The Polish film director Malgorzata Juszczak filmed it in 2020.

CJFF is always on the lookout for documentaries focused on environmental justice, especially close to home. Indeed, the feedback received from a majority of film

festival attendees is that the environment is their top justice concern. If you have an environmental justice film to recommend, please contact us at: administration@calgaryfilmfestival.ca.

CJFF is one of the few film festivals that does not charge an entry fee since it is volunteer-run. As well, its main venue, River Park Church, does not charge for the use of their auditorium or the gymnasium where the Peace Fair is held, nor does the downtown Calgary Public Library charge when their hall is used for screenings. Calgary Arts Development Authority is an important financial supporter of the film festival. It has also had long-term financial sponsorship from a variety of businesses including Canadian Western Bank and Ptarmigan Oil & Gas Accounting.

The 2022 CJFF opening night kicked off at the Calgary Central Public Library with the documentary, *To Kill a Tiger*, about sexual injustice in India. The film festival then moved to River Park Church the next two days and screened films focusing on the environment, ageism, gender identity, racism, and equality. The Peace Fair was held both days hosting 18 organizations including Ploughshares, Fair Trade Calgary, Calgary Youth Justice Committee, Centre for Newcomers, Building Schools in South Sudan and Calgary Outlink Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity.

This year CJFF will run a program called 'JustReels' where every three months a film will be screened. On April 14, the Alberta premiere of *Unarchived*, a National Film Board production, is set to be shown in the evening at the Central Public Library. November 17, 18 and 19 will see the launch of the 18th Calgary Justice Film Festival. CJFF welcomes everyone at any and all of its events.

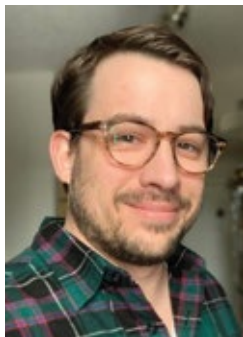


Deborah Donnelly and Sean Nichols both represented AWA by attending an informational booth at the 2022 CJFF. Photo © D. Donnelly.

New Book Alert!

The End of This World: Climate Justice in So-Called Canada

By Joël Laforest

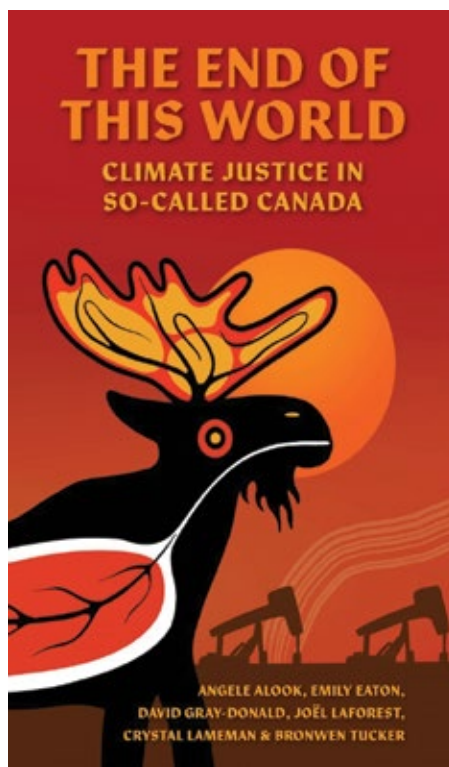


What would it look like if we were to collectively think through our pressing social, ecological and political problems, envision a world we might genuinely want to inhabit together, and sketch a roadmap of how we might actually get there?

My co-authors and I took on this challenge in *The End of This World: Climate Justice in So-Called Canada*, paying particular attention to the roles of Indigenous rights, decarbonization, energy transition, systems of care, and political strategy.

The goal was to envision a departure from the strategies of co-optation and delay that have stalled the assertion of Indigenous rights, climate work and just transition for far too long. As readers are no doubt aware, the “new” denialism is not to deny the reality of anthropocentric climate change, but instead to downplay its risks, shirk any sense of urgency, and propose projects that are woefully inadequate to the task of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and keeping global heating below a 1.5°C pathway.

Similarly, the prominence of Indigenous rights and struggles has grown in Canada over recent years, and has been met to a large degree with a range of important symbolic and cultural recognition. What this recognition evades, however, is Indigenous peoples’ inherent rights, Treaty rights, and ultimately their sovereignty and relationship with ancestral land — particularly the right to say “no” and to propose economic development that aligns with their values. The implications are enormous when one considers how such



Look for *The End of this World* at your local bookstore.
Cover Image © Between the Lines Books.

an approach might shape future mining, forestry and fossil fuel production.

The central injustice of the climate crisis is that those who are least responsible for it are set to be the most affected by it. Some very straightforward steps can be taken to address the outsized influence of the fossil fuel industry and its role in shaping our future. Supply-side restrictions (keeping it in the ground), ending fossil fuel subsidies, and insisting that polluters pay are among them. More generally, public ownership and a managed wind-down would allow for the redirection of profits to community needs and the launching of much-needed just transition programs for fossil fuel workers.

A buildout of green infrastructure and renewable energy is a necessary step on the road to decarbonization. This buildout presents an opportunity to coordinate with Indigenous nations as partners, and presents an opportunity to provide both jobs and affordable green energy. Most importantly, distributed electricity generation might avoid the pitfalls of large “green” megaprojects that — in addition to being wildly expensive — tend to have substantial ecological impacts and do not recognize Indigenous sovereignty.

Housing throughout the country and

in Indigenous communities is in urgent need of public investment and retrofits. With affordability quickly eroding and the postwar social housing stock quickly ageing, a buildout of high-quality public housing could provide both a jobs program and a long-term measure to increase energy efficiency and reduce emissions. The need to transform our transportation system is also a priority: while electric vehicles gain a great deal of public attention, we argue that a national intercity and rural bus/rail network, attentive to each Nation’s priorities and wishes, is the sensible solution to the decline of regional public transit services in the last decades. The need to prioritize public transportation and sensible land use within cities is also key.

The importance of care work was made evident in the COVID-19 pandemic. We argue that this work of social reproduction — often low-wage, gendered and highly racialized — should be prioritized as a critical part of a just transition. Universal public services, from mental health to education to eldercare and childcare, would not only provide popular services and jobs, but would afford greater social cohesion and solidarity. We need to design our systems of care so as to provide the time and resources necessary to foster relationships that provide safety and security.

Finally, we are well aware that these proposals cannot simply be summoned through good intentions. Our book concludes with an exploration of what might be necessary in terms of strategies, network-building, and campaigns to enact these ideas. Here the aim is not the immediate wholesale transformation of society (though that would be nice), but rather a thinking through of the best strategies that can shift the existing terrain in our favour for future campaigns and struggles.

Readers of the *Wild Lands Advocate* may take particular interest in the focus on Indigenous rights and land stewardship within the book. As potent sites of legal and social-movement struggle, efforts to restore right relations between peoples and their lands are simultaneously opportunities to further prevent the further erosion of ecosystems through economic rent and industrial extraction.



CUB REPORTER

Send us your Wilderness Stories!

By Phillip Meintzer

Attention all young environmentalists! Are you — or is somebody you know — interested in contributing to the *Wild Lands Advocate* magazine? Alberta Wilderness Association is looking to feature articles written by young authors from across Alberta to highlight the diversity of stories, experiences, and opinions that young people have about wilderness, wildlife, outdoor recreation, and/or conservation in the province we call home.

We call this segment of our magazine

the Cub Reporter, and we provide this space to Alberta's youth to ensure that our discussion of environmental topics isn't dominated solely by "grown-ups" while neglecting the voices of up-and-coming young environmentalists. We feel that the perspectives of young people play a key role in building an understanding of the importance of nature to all generations, and we need to be mindful of the fact that Alberta's young people will inherit this landscape — including all of its beauty and wonder, as well as its challenges.

We are inviting you, or anyone you may know who is under the age of 18 to submit written stories. The submissions can range from 250 to 750 words on environmental topics of your interest. We ask that all submitted stories be relevant to Alberta. It is important to note that we cannot promise

that all stories will be published, as the final decision is left with the editor.

To give you an example of the kinds of stories we have published in the past, previous Cub Reporter articles have talked about the joys of backcountry camping in Kananaskis and sleeping under the stars, the patterns (or "snow angels") that animals leave for us after a fresh snowfall, the story of a youth climate activist who challenged the federal government in court, and backyard bee-boxes to help with local pollinators.

We would love to hear about your experiences with Alberta's natural world, and we hope that you will consider sharing these stories with us, and with our readers!

Submissions and inquiries can be sent by email to either pmeintzer@abwild.ca or outreach@abwild.ca



Introducing Amy Tucker: AWA's new Outreach & Communications Specialist

By Amy Tucker



There's a short, gravel road a little ways off Highway 22 west of Calgary, not unlike the other driveways that dot the range road. But, if you head through the first gate, along the dense rows of coniferous trees, past a loop that takes you to a dog kennel, you'll wind up in the heart of a long-standing wildlife rehabilitation and conservation facility in Alberta.

The place is a centre for wildlife rescue — it takes in orphaned or injured wildlife, with the goal of eventually releasing them. On some occasions, the animals have to stay because their afflictions are too

extensive to survive in the wild. Other times, the organisation is too late to save an animal, like one that may have strayed into traffic. And sometimes, the organisation is barred from taking the animal in, due to government policies. The researchers there, among other things, also work to reintroduce extirpated flora and fauna.

When I got out of the car the first time I showed up there a few years ago as an early-career journalist, the initial sight of the organisation's approximately 160 acres of mixed habitat took my breath away.

I was immediately welcomed in by a friendly albeit shaggy-coated dog that came bounding toward me, then stopped a bit short, wagging its tail and barking. That was the cue for the president of the organisation, who came out of an old but charming building beyond a gate, to come meet me.

She led me into the main part of the facility, where she explained that somewhere in those various enclosures were recovering wildlife — ungulates, foxes and more. Beyond an old stone wall was a small bison herd. I was still in awe in each of my following visits.

Though I had known for a long time that I wanted to be involved in some way with environmental work, it was during that first visit that I knew I had to get involved in conservation.

Fast forward about five years, and I've

now found myself doing just that: working for a different conservation group based in Calgary — the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). As their new Outreach and Communications Specialist, I'll hopefully help to bolster AWA's conservation efforts by making the organisation's presence better known in the community and online.

Before I came to AWA, I was working for CBC North, covering all three territories. The North is home to some of the most vast and wild spaces in the country, and from my experience working for the North's team, I learned it's also home to people who live on, thrive off of, and cherish the land in equal measure. It's a trait that has left a mark on me and a lesson I will carry forward.

My desire to help protect the environment came long before my journalism career. I was born and raised in Calgary, and I developed a love for Alberta's Rockies from an early age. As an adult I'm constantly outdoors trying new activities, from skiing, hiking, kayaking and more recently, bee keeping.

I have a passion for writing and photography, and these are among the skills I hope to contribute towards AWA's effort to protect the environment. I hope to help strengthen the community's awareness of the environmental issues faced by the province and help shine a light on the great work being done by our staff at AWA.

IN MEMORIAM

Hugh Wollis: 1948 - 2022



*Hugh was passionate about conserving and protecting healthy habitat. Tackling the removal and control of invasive Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) at Wabamum Lake meant waterfowl and fish would benefit. Photo supplied by Hugh's family.*

Hugh was passionate about conserving and protecting healthy habitat. Tackling the removal and control of invasive Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) at Wabamum Lake meant waterfowl and fish would benefit. Photo supplied by Hugh's family.

On a cold October morning, news that our friend and a truly great defender of wildlife had suddenly and very unexpectedly passed away sent a chill of sadness through our hearts and through the hearts of all those who knew him. Hugh Wollis will always be remembered for his passion and the

difference he made as he mentored a younger generation, who needed his years of expertise and experience to help them learn and understand how important their conservation work is. Hugh was an untiring defender of wildlife, and the habitat wildlife needs to thrive and be healthy.

There are many who had the chance to know Hugh, including many long-time friends, colleagues and most importantly family; a family that is so proud of him and the things he did for each of them to let them know how much he cared for and loved them.

From the 1980s, when AWA was working to promote directional drilling to save precious alpine habitats, to more recent years when his concerns were about protecting western grebes and opposing a government decision to allow hunting of Sandhill Cranes, Hugh was watching and making his own decisions about how best to defend wilderness in Alberta. He called AWA from time to time to see what he could do to help AWA's work on various files; he was tireless and always available for a call or a chance to meet. Hugh took a

stand and was a role model for those who worked with him and learned from him.

In the months prior to Hugh's passing, he and his wife Donna, both long-time supporters and members of AWA, made a significant donation to AWA of a piece of land in north-central Alberta. The funds from this gift have made an important difference and are vital to AWA's ongoing financial strength. AWA and its Board of Directors, staff and volunteers are grateful and humbled by this recognition from Hugh and Donna that enables AWA's day-to-day work to continue. AWA's work in defending wild Alberta through awareness and action includes inspiring people to care. Hugh cared in many concrete ways that became inspirational to many. Perhaps even more importantly, AWA has gained immeasurable strength from knowing supporters like Hugh and Donna care and want to see AWA be independent and strong for years to come!

With sincere sympathy to Donna and Hugh's family in their loss; Hugh will not be forgotten.

- Christyann Olson

Stanley Rosenbaum: 1927 - 2021



Stanley Rosenbaum led a remarkable life of adventure, mountaineering, backcountry skiing and advocating for natural spaces, as well as a career as a semiconductor

inventor. A past President of the Alpine Club of Canada, he participated in the Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition, climbing Centennial Peak during the main expedition. From Ottawa to Edmonton his adventurous spirit saw him leading tours in the Adirondacks and routinely enjoying trips in Alberta's mountains and on ski touring trails in Kananaskis Country. Stanley and his partner Jean Wilman were keenly interested in wild spaces and routinely enjoyed reading AWA's *Wild Lands Advocate* together. We are so grateful

for all that Stanley did for wild spaces and conservation and that he included AWA as he planned for his legacy.

AWA is one of several conservation and naturalist groups who received bequests from Stanley. He will always be part of the legacy that keeps AWA passionate, untiring, and dedicated to defending Wild Alberta. We offer sincere condolences to his family in their loss and thanks to Stanley for this gift and for all he gave to conservation and wild spaces through the years.

- Christyann Olson

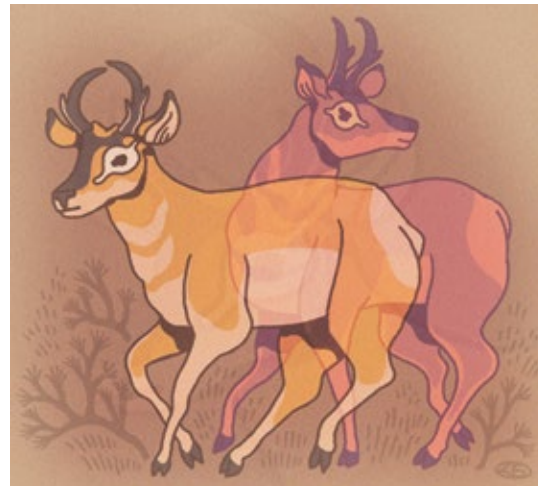
Feature Artists

Ris W



Ris (they/them) is a trans nonbinary child of Chinese immigrants, born in so-called Edmonton (Treaty Six Territory) – the traditional land of the nêhiyaw / Cree, Dene, Anishinaabe / Saulteaux, Nakota Isga / Nakota Sioux, and Niitsitapi / Blackfoot peoples. They are a designer, illustrator, and full-time cat parent. They are an avid learner and teacher (and believer that the dichotomy

of those two roles should be blurred), and are learning how to dismantle power structures that marginalize people and commodify our connections as living beings to each other and to our environment. Ris is inspired by art and storytelling as ways to communicate our values and history and create community connections.

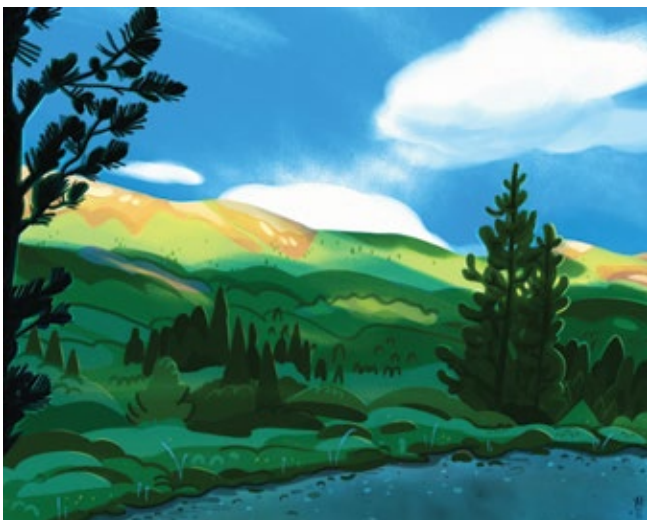


Adrienne Tollas



Adrienne Tollas (she/they) is a queer, neurodivergent illustrator with a love for storytelling, bold shapes, and vibrant colours. Her artwork is inspired by nature, informal fantasy, science fiction, and humans

who prioritize people, and our living world, over profit. When they aren't drawing or painting, she enjoys travelling by bicycle year-round in Mohkínstsis, on Treaty 7 Territory (so-called Calgary, Canada).





UPCOMING ADVENTURES

www.adventuresforwilderness.ca



April 1 – Crocus Hunt on Nose Hill

April 22 – Earth Day Stair Climb

June 3 – Ice, Glaciers, Gravel and Oil

June 10 – Botany and Birds on the Milk River Ridge

June 24 – Wainwright Dunes Adventure

Photo © J. Skrajny

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