

Departments

A Farewell to Carolyn Campbell

From Alberta Wilderness Association, written by Amy Tucker

A note to Carolyn: The time you spent at AWA has made an enormous impact, not just on the environment, but on the people you met, mentored, and were a friend to along the way. Many of the people who worked with you over the years reached out to share their memories with you, offer you well wishes, and of course, thank you for protecting our wilderness and for being someone to look up to. The following article is a tribute to you.

When Carolyn Campbell was first offered a job at Alberta Wilderness Association, she didn't immediately say yes, according to the former executive director. Christyann Olson, who led AWA for over 20 years, said she remembers Carolyn taking her time to consider her responsibilities and the people she would work with. "She interviewed them to be sure this work, this new career for hers, would be a great fit," said Christyann.

That careful consideration, Christyann said, of investigation and research is "perhaps Carolyn's trademark." Carolyn did eventually accept the job, and for the next 16 years, she was a leader, a mentor, and a meticulous researcher. Most recently, she's been serving as AWA's conservation director. June will mark her last month in the role before retiring. From caribou protection, to fighting to preserve the unique McClelland Lake wetlands in northern Alberta, Carolyn has made an enormous impact in Alberta conservation.

Christyann said in her day-to-day work, Carolyn exemplified AWA and its mission of defending wilderness and helping others learn and be inspired to care, leading by example, and "above all" with her passion for understanding the relevant history and knowing the facts. "Carolyn was always one of, if not the most prepared person at the table when she was in meetings or making



Carolyn Campbell has worked for AWA for almost 20 years, and her work has been vital to the protection of natural spaces and wildlife.

presentations," Christyann recalled of their time working together.

"The support she had from her family through the years, at events, for long hours, for heading out on trails and to be in the field, has proved to be a vital part of her success. Carolyn has been a steadfast part of AWA's success and will always be remembered as part of the team."

It was around 2007 when Chris Saunders, AWA board member, first encountered Carolyn as he was looking for volunteer opportunities at AWA. He had been invited to meet the staff who were in the office that day — and Carolyn happened to be the first person there. "I heard about Carolyn's workload and the significance of the problems she was trying to solve. One of them was the threat to the McClelland Lake watershed," Chris said. "I was impressed by Carolyn's calmness, realism, and commitment. Carolyn's approach was focused and rigorous ... I wish her all the very best. It has been a pleasure to work with her."

Jim Campbell, an AWA board member, said one of the most powerful experiences with Carolyn he remembers early on was

hearing her present on a subject.

"It's joyfully intimidating," Jim said. "Because, you're thinking, I'm sitting in front of somebody who really knows what they're talking about. She's one of those people who you could throw anything at them and they will give you a full and detailed response on the issue — and totally rational, totally calm." He added that "you'll never be able to outsmart, out fox, out debate Carolyn, because she is going to know the file better than anyone."

AWA board member Cliff Wallis said Carolyn was able to "move the ball down the field" while working on the caribou file. He said some of her ENGO friends who also work on caribou were in tears when they heard she was retiring. "Fortunately, Carolyn is just retiring, not disappearing. She will still be around to weigh in so that gives all of us great comfort," Cliff said. "We are most appreciative of the contributions she has made ... I wish her all the joys and rewards of being out in nature more. Thanks, Carolyn, for the hard work, passion, guidance, and inspiration!"

Her thoroughness also struck Sean Nichols, who worked with Carolyn for many years. He said he has a friend who calls work that has been done perfectly as "good enough" — work done to any less a standard, is not. "In my mind, Carolyn personifies that ultimate standard," he explained. "The only things that I can imagine Carolyn considering good enough to attach her name to, are those where every detail has been considered, and found correct."

Before Carolyn came to AWA, she was an economist. Sean said that experience and "the rigour this background imparts has bestowed on AWA a level of credibility that cannot be overstated." Adding that "AWA has benefitted immeasurably from this meticulous attention to detail over the years. If Carolyn has written something, it is trustworthy. One can be certain that there

is no conjecture posing as fact.”

Edmonton-based AWA board member Richard Secord said he appreciated the many trips that Carolyn made to support AWA events in his home city over the years — especially the evening talks at Jackson Power & Electric Ltd. “Many of the trips were made in very sketchy weather in the wintertime,” Richard added. “Carolyn has been a wonderful ambassador for AWA and her contribution to conservation efforts in Alberta has been immense.”

Joanna Skrajny, who was an AWA conservation specialist before moving on to law school, had the chance to be mentored by Carolyn. “Carolyn was there through thick and thin and always took the time to listen, no matter how busy her day was,” she said. “I fondly remember all of the wonderful conversations and excursions that we have shared — whether it was dealing with a crazy day of media calls, going on a hike, or simply enjoying a meal together.” Joanna added that Carolyn “has a great big heart and is unwaveringly loyal to both the environment and the people in her life. She has managed to move mountains with her persistence and patience ... Congratulations Carolyn — You have made such an amazing impact with your work. I hope your days are filled with music, wildflowers, and sunshine.”

Carolyn’s current work family will also miss her cheerful and good-natured presence at the office, and the wealth of knowledge she is always willing to share.

Among the fondest memories of working with Carolyn for Lindsey Wallis, AWA’s event specialist, was from her days as a writer. “I hated calling people for interviews, but I always looked forward to speaking with Carolyn. The kind voice on the other end of the phone puts one at ease,” Lindsey said. “Her knowledge of conservation issues in Alberta is wide-ranging and deep — I can always count on her for an insightful answer to my questions ... She is a wealth of knowledge, and the thoughtful, passionate work she has put in has left an indelible mark on the conservation community in Alberta.” Lindsey added that it is because of Carolyn, along with

many others, that caribou might continue to roam Alberta’s forests for generations. “Carolyn’s genuine compassion and deep connection to Alberta’s wild spaces is infectious,” said Lindsey. “I wish her and George the very best as they take time to enjoy these wild places that she has poured her heart and soul into protecting for so many years.”

Phillip Meintzer, AWA conservation specialist said he feels “incredibly privileged to have had Carolyn’s mentorship and guidance” over the two plus years they worked together. “I only wish that we could have had a longer working relationship, because her shoes will be difficult — or impossible — to fill.” Phillip added that Carolyn, even when dealing with interests who are hostile to AWA’s goals, “is an expert in the art of diplomacy ... I hope that I may one day be able to emulate her ability to remain graceful in the face of resistance,” he said. Phillip added he appreciates “the way that she consistently refocuses our work to ensure that we are being strong allies to Indigenous communities who need our support.” From the start, Carolyn made an impression on Phillip. He said it was Carolyn who asked Phillip “the most thoughtful and philosophical of all the questions,” during his job interview.

AWA’s current executive director, Debborah Donnelly, said that Carolyn has gone above and beyond over her many years in representing AWA. “She has been a fountain of knowledge for me since I joined AWA last August. Her experience has helped in guiding the work of the conservation staff, but also in providing context and contacts for me during my transition,” Debborah said. “I will deeply miss her. Carolyn, I wish you the happiest retirement!!”

Ruiping Luo, AWA conservation specialist, said she has really appreciated Carolyn’s guidance. “She’s so knowledgeable about Alberta’s political structure and she taught me a lot on writing statements, speaking about environmental issues and strategies for working with government,” Ruiping said. “I’ll miss her insightful comments and additions to our conversations.”

For AWA conservation specialist Devon Earl, Carolyn has been an inspiration and role model since Devon joined the team two years ago. “She always knows the right questions to ask, and gives thoughtful and thorough feedback. I appreciate the time she took to listen and get to know me, and her one-on-one mentorship. Above all of that, I will miss her positive presence in the office greatly,” Devon said. “Carolyn is such a kind and caring person, and that is evident in the work that she has done and in her interactions with others. She has affected real change in the world of conservation, and her retirement is well-deserved. I wish all the best for her in the next chapter of life.”

Randi Ducharme, AWA admin and bookkeeping specialist, said the privilege of working with Carolyn for the past year has been a wonderful experience. “She is the warmth of our office; she greets our team every day with her kind smile and always makes a point to see how your day is going,” Randi said.

“She is an ocean of knowledge and the passion in her work is inspiring. She is the most thorough person I have ever worked with and one of the best communicators. Carolyn is always willing to help and offer her opinion, which is so respected, her presence will be greatly missed. Congratulations on your retirement Carolyn, your mentorship has helped strengthen some great wilderness defenders!”

Amy Tucker, outreach and communications specialist, said in the short time she got to know Carolyn, she’s been a guiding force. When Amy recently came on board as part of AWA’s team, it was Carolyn who helped make her feel at home. “Carolyn was the first person to stop by my office and asked to have lunch with me. She asked me thoughtful questions about myself, and offered her own advice to me, which I will never forget,” Amy said. “I appreciate how Carolyn can move through the world making such positive change, yet doing so with gentleness. All the best to you in your future endeavours, Carolyn.”