

Alberta Wilderness Association



Wilderness exists where large areas are characterized by the dominance of natural processes, the presence of the full complement of plant and animal communities characteristic of the region, and the absence of human constraints on nature. - Alberta Wilderness Association

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2020-2025

Acknowledgement

The preparation of a strategic planning document is an ongoing effort that requires the careful consideration and reflection of those who will carry the plan through to fulfillment. AWA is fortunate to have passionate and dedicated staff and board members who have a vision and the ability to articulate the path forward to achieve that vision. With sincere thanks and appreciation to all staff and the board of directors who have developed this vital guiding document.

Cover Photo: Writing On Stone Provincial Park looking to the Sweetgrass Hills. © Joanna Skrajny



Alberta Wilderness Association

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Introduction

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is the oldest wilderness conservation group in Alberta dedicated to the completion of a protected areas network and the conservation of wilderness throughout the province. Founded in 1965 in rural southwest Alberta by backcountry enthusiasts, ranchers and outfitters, AWA has grown into a province-wide organization. With more than 50 years of success, it is known for its tenacity, corporate memory and integrity. AWA is a non-profit, federally registered, charitable society. It has a provincial office and resource centre in Calgary, and active members and volunteers throughout Alberta.

The following document is AWA's strategic framework and identifies the guiding principles and strategic goals for AWA's operations and plans. We believe that our strategic plan must be goal oriented and that goals must be measurable and achievable within the timeframe of the plan. It is a forward-thinking and challenging vision for outreach, conservation, and education. The plan demonstrates AWA's strength, dedication, and passion for *Wild Alberta* and sets a course for organizational growth and financial strength.

Values

Ecocentredness

We recognize the inherent importance of Nature and humankind's place in it; AWA is an advocate for that which cannot speak for itself.

Integrity

We conduct our advocacy with truth, honesty, and respect for others.

Respectfulness

We develop rapport with individuals and communities through active listening, openness, and free access to information in a democratic way.

Participation

We promote effective environmental decision making through an empowered and knowledgeable public that is inclusive of all segments of society.

Tenacity

We will steadfastly advocate for Nature in a manner true to our principles through innovation, persistence, and passion.

Passion

We are free to feel, demonstrate, and encourage an emotional and spiritual connectedness with nature.

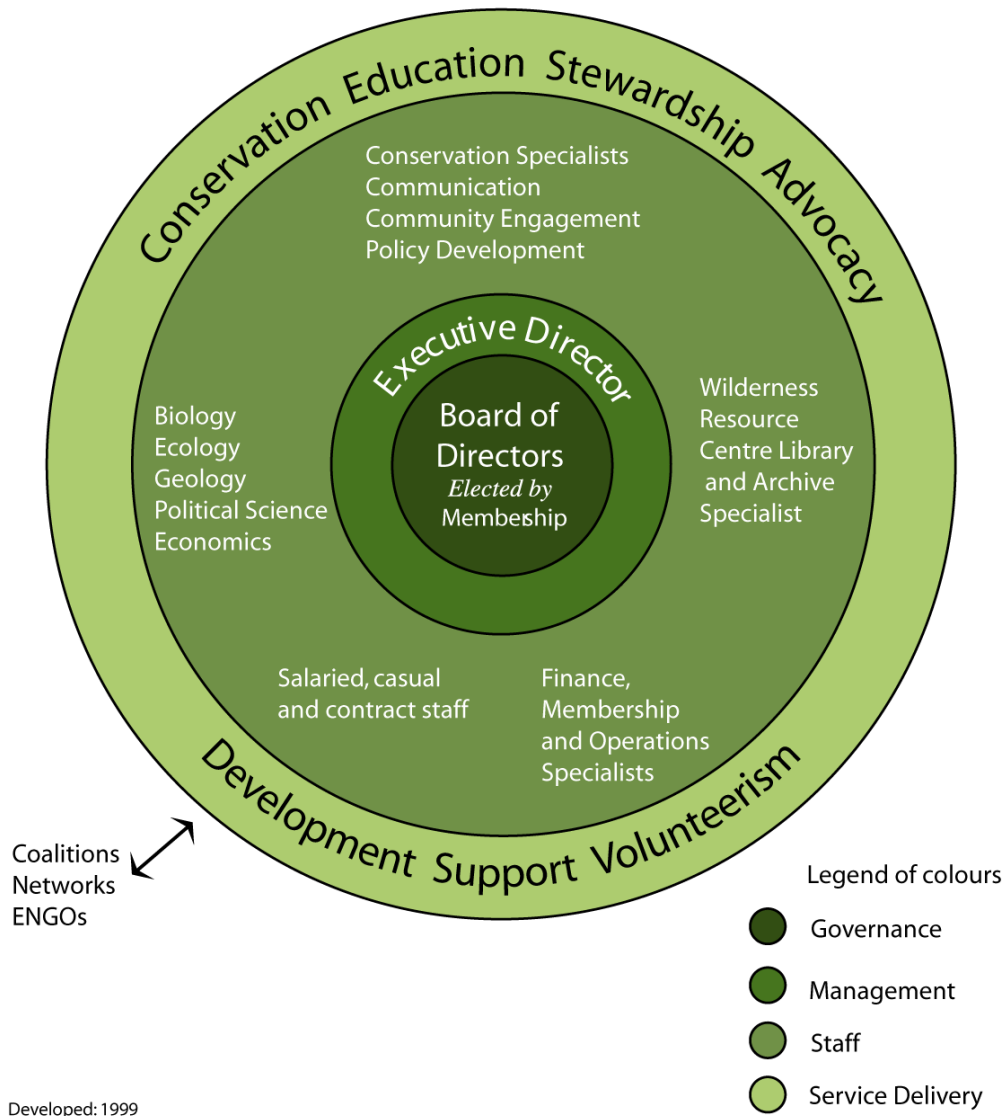
Organizational Structure

AWA achieves its mission through conservation, education, stewardship and advocacy, and is supported through volunteers, members, and donors. AWA has a legacy of responsive adaptation to a changing conservation world and renews and develops programs to create awareness and inspire communities and individuals to care.

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION Organization Chart



Alberta Wilderness Association



Strategic Plan

A land ethic reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity. – Aldo Leopold

Mission: “Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action”

Defending Wild Alberta...

AWA speaks out in defence of those who have no voice: wilderness, wildlife, and wild waters throughout Alberta.

... through Awareness...

AWA works to raise awareness and inspire communities to care and take action to protect Alberta’s wilderness.

... and Action.

AWA works with communities, industry, and government towards maintaining and enhancing the value provided by wilderness, wildlife, and wild waters for current and future Albertans. AWA is outspoken and willing to engage politically on issues concerning wilderness conservation in the province.

Vision

Protected Wilderness

A comprehensive system of protected areas that encompass the province’s diverse wildlands, wildlife, and wild waters:

- Alberta establishes an effective network of protected areas. This includes:
 - a) **Representative protection** of Alberta’s six natural regions.
 - b) **Large, natural core areas** that serve as the foundation of the network.
 - c) **Buffer zones** for protected areas.
 - d) **Connectivity** between protected areas, including rivers and migratory pathways.
 - e) Inclusion of **Indigenous knowledge and participation**.
- Alberta’s public lands are conserved in perpetuity for generations to come, in recognition of the countless vital resources and services they provide.
- Wildlife decline is reversed through legally enforced habitat protections and recovery plans for species at risk.

Conservation Ethic

A society with decision-making processes, policies and laws that protects and values nature for its own inherent worth:

- Albertans have a sense of connectedness to Alberta’s wild places and wildlife
- Albertans can engage effectively with government, industry, and other sectors of society on matters concerning the wild, natural ecosystems of Alberta
- Albertans are knowledgeable about the value, ecologically sustainable use, and conservation of wilderness and of natural lands, water, and wildlife
- Governments, industry and other sectors of society have policies and laws that protect and value nature

Effective and Credible

AWA is an effective and credible advocate that fosters awareness and helps Albertans protect wild areas and wildlife:

- AWA's policies and positions are based on the best-available scientific and indigenous knowledge, and are founded in the Precautionary Principle
- AWA will seek increased diversity among staff, volunteers, and members in an effort to build organizational capacity in an increasingly diverse and complex world.
- AWA has sufficient resources to speak independently on wilderness issues.

Goals and Objectives: 2020-2025

AWA's broad goals and objectives to achieve our vision follow. Specific work plans are developed annually; metrics and outcomes are published in the Annual Report.

Protected Wilderness

Alberta establishes an effective network of protected areas. This includes:

- a) Representative protection*** of Alberta's six natural regions.
- b) Large, natural core areas*** that serve as the foundation of the network.
- c) Buffer zones*** for protected areas.
- d) Connectivity*** between protected areas, including rivers and migratory pathways.
- e) Inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and participation.***

Goal: Improve Alberta's Protected Areas Network

Fill vital gaps in our protected network, including vital headwaters, underrepresented Natural Regions and habitat for species at risk.

Objective: Conserve AWA's Areas of Concern

AWA uses the names Wild Spaces and Areas of Concern to refer to areas that are critical to a network of protected representative landscapes in Alberta. These areas and the networks they can create are the basis of our Wild Alberta map and in some ways represent a visual strategic conservation plan for AWA.

Areas of Concern are split along geographic and thematic similarities and assigned to individual staff members who take the lead role in those areas when related issues arise. Different areas of work will have varying levels of involvement, ranging from monitoring an area to developing comprehensive campaigns.

Boreal Forest

Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region covers 381,000 km², more than 57 percent of the entire province. AWA believes that the Boreal Forest Natural Region of Alberta requires thoughtful management that

integrates the social and economic needs of the region within a framework that prioritizes conserving the ecological integrity of the region for generations to come.

AWA's priorities within the Boreal include:

- 1) Advancing solutions to achieve the 'undisturbed' habitat threshold that naturally self-sustaining caribou populations require. This includes enforceable sub-regional caribou range plans that manage access and industrial impacts to habitat so caribou can recover and communities can thrive. In each caribou range we also seek an area of permanent protection from industrial activity that includes meaningful collaborative management with indigenous communities. Caribou ranges overlap with AWA's Primrose-Lakeland, Athabasca Rapids, Athabasca Delta-Dunes, Birch-Wabasca, Bistcho, and Chinchaga boreal Areas of Concern..
- 2) Protection of key watersheds, in particular the Peace River Valley, the McClelland watershed, Hay-Zama Lakes complex, and the Peace-Athabasca Delta.
- 3) Achieving the effective management of cumulative effects across multiple-use landscapes

Rocky Mountains

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

AWA's priorities within the Rocky Mountains Natural Region include:

- 1) The protection of key wilderness areas such as the Bighorn Wildland and the Castle Wilderness
- 2) On remaining public lands, the establishment of Public Land Use Zones (PLUZs) and undertaking sub-regional planning initiatives, in order to establish motorized and non-motorized trail systems and manage industrial development to a high standard in appropriate areas which protect threatened native fish and other key conservation values. In addition, an effective Biodiversity Management Framework is urgently needed to manage all human footprint on the landscape.
- 3) Halt unsustainable and harmful industrial disturbances, such as proposed coal mines in the Livingstone and industrial-scale logging in critical watersheds within the Southern Eastern Slopes

Foothills

With the rolling forested hills and slopes providing vital habitat for many wildlife species, and the cool clear rivers harboring imperiled native trout, the Foothills are a critical piece of Alberta's wilderness. Unfortunately, this landscape has been subjected to a significant amount of human development. As a result, the Foothills are scored by an extensive network of roads, trails, power lines, seismic lines, cutblocks and pipeline access routes, the majority of which see an extensive amount of use by motorized recreationists. AWA believes that the Foothills Natural Region requires increased protection complemented by science-based management to prevent and restore the impact of damaging land uses on these public lands. This should be done in addition to supporting the recovery of at risk native species including endangered Woodland caribou and Athabasca rainbow trout.

AWA's priorities within the Foothills Natural Region include:

- 1) The protection and restoration of critical landscapes such as the Little Smoky, Kakwa, and the North Saskatchewan and Ram River Corridors
- 2) The establishment of Public Land Use Zones (PLUZs) and undertaking sub-regional planning initiatives, which would establish motorized and non-motorized trail systems and manage industrial

development to a high standard in appropriate areas which protect threatened caribou, native fish, and other key conservation values.

Grasslands

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

AWA's priorities within the Grasslands Natural Region include:

- 1) Habitat protection and the recovery of Greater Sage-grouse
- 2) Protection of promised SSRP Conservation Areas, including the expansion of Twin River Heritage Rangeland

Parkland

The Parkland Natural Region is 60,747 km² in size, encompassing 9.2 percent of Alberta. As the transition between grasslands and forests, the Parkland is exceptionally diverse in both landscapes and vegetation. Unfortunately, the Parkland is also the most populated containing the municipalities of Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton and has extensive agricultural development. With only 5 percent of the Region's natural vegetation remaining, AWA believes that increased protection of the Parkland Natural Region is urgently needed.

AWA priorities within the Parkland Natural Region include:

- 1) A halt to new surface disturbances and the sale of remaining public lands within the Parkland
- 2) The protection and restoration of public lands that contain native Parkland habitat, including the Parkland Dunes and Rumsey

Objective: Use Government Commitments to Achieve Increased Protections

Land Use Framework

AWA has participated actively in the regional planning processes for the first three Land-Use Framework regions: the Lower Athabasca, South Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan. AWA supporters have been encouraged to participate at every opportunity in the planning process. Since its adoption in 2008, the Land Use Framework has been one of the primary mechanisms for achieving provincially protected areas. The process to develop regional plans has been slow to date, and plans to operationalize the Framework are even slower. The next planning processes to commence are expected to be the Upper Peace Regional Plan (UPRP) and Upper Athabasca Regional Plan (UARP). AWA will continue to provide reasonable suggestions for protection, deferral of activities and alternative mechanisms for achieving conservation and protection, within and outside of the Land Use Framework process.

Aichi Targets

The Aichi Targets were set in Aichi, Japan in 2010 by signatories to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, including Canada. In 2015, the federal government adopted Aichi Target 11 as Canada's primary target ("Canada Target 1") to achieve by 2020. Canada Target 1 states that:

"By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures."

AWA's recent efforts to advance protections across the province included the *Wild Spaces 2020* campaign, which was launched in the fall of 2018 to ignite support and awareness for Alberta's Wild Spaces. The campaign highlighted AWA's areas of concern across Alberta's six Natural Regions, featuring current issues, ecological, social and economic values, and ways members can support conservation. Emphasizing the imbalance in representative protection between Alberta's Natural Regions, and expressing the need for increased protection in the Grasslands, Parkland, and Foothills Natural Regions was key. The campaign has involved a series of presentations and social media posts describing Wild Spaces, Canada Target 1, and the need for representative protection.

In the near future, it is likely the Convention on Biological Diversity will set the next biodiversity target as 30 percent protection by 2030, a significant challenge for Canada if the current rate of creating protected areas continues. AWA will continue to press for a representative protected areas network within Alberta.

Goal: Recover Species at Risk

Wildlife decline is reversed through legally enforced habitat protections and recovery plans for species at risk.

Objective: Achieve Legislated Habitat Protection for Species at Risk

AWA is committed to the protection of publicly owned wildlife, wild lands, and wild waters in Alberta. Because we know the best way to protect wildlife is to protect where they live, AWA's focus is on protection and better management of wildlife habitat.

With immense declines in global biodiversity, public representatives need to be accountable for creating a framework that is robust enough to protect Alberta's wildlife and habitat, and is reflective of the public's intrinsic value for wildlife.

The federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* and other pieces of legislation provide stronger measures of protection than Alberta's *Wildlife Act*, however, provincial governments have primary jurisdiction over lands and resource management. AWA seeks more comprehensive provincial policy and legislation, and for the federal enforcement to be as strong as possible.

Species at Risk Act (SARA)

Effective application of SARA to bring about more habitat protection is needed. The two primary protections provided under *SARA* are listing of the species – which prohibits the killing, capture or harassment of species at risk – and critical habitat orders – which protect the habitat necessary for the survival and recovery of the species.

Species at risk listings usually occur several years after the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recommends a certain species is at some level of risk of extirpation. Studies have shown that when a listing decision is made, the least likely species to receive listing are species perceived to be economically valuable, species managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), or those that occur only in Canada. Recovery strategies, protection orders, and action plans for the majority of species listed under SARA are either issued well past legislated deadlines or not at all.

AWA and partner conservation groups are at constant vigil and have found it necessary to turn to legal action in order to have the government invoke the protections within *SARA*.

As habitat protection orders under *SARA* apply more readily to federal lands than to provincial lands, there are many species that have been left stranded. In the case of caribou, AWA has been working relentlessly with colleagues across the country to ensure enough habitat is protected to ensure the population stability and recovery of this iconic species.

Additional tools within *SARA* that, to date, have been underused by the federal government include:

- prosecutions and charges under the *Species at Risk Act* for the killing of species at risk and/or for the destruction of critical habitat, and
- a safety net order, which a Minister can issue if they believe provinces/territories have failed to protect a species' critical habitat. Safety net orders extend the protections under *SARA* to provincial and territorial lands. To date, not a single safety net order has been issued.

Wildlife Act

Alberta's *Wildlife Act* is out of date, focuses on managing hunting rather than habitat, and has a tremendous number of bureaucratic hurdles that hinders effective progress towards preventing the extirpation of endangered or threatened species in Alberta. AWA continues to raise awareness and advocate for improved provincial legislation that hastens the designation of species at risk, requires the legal protection of critical habitat, and provides means for developing and implementing enforceable recovery strategies within obligatory timelines.

Fish and Wildlife Policy

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

Objective: Improve Actions and Plans to Recover Species at Risk

AWA is actively involved in providing feedback and recommendations for Alberta's species at risk, whether they are provincially or federally designated. AWA continues to monitor and provide input on the progress of recovery processes for wildlife, including proposed additions to the species listed under the Species at Risk Act (SARA). When the opportunity arises, AWA will provide comments on proposed documents open for public consultation prepared under SARA. When necessary, AWA will develop campaigns to encourage awareness and action by citizens and decision makers regarding gaps in recovery strategies.

Objective: Increase Public Awareness of Species at Risk

Wildlife are charismatic symbols of Alberta's wilderness; raising awareness of species at risk can be an effective tool to raise support for the protection of their habitat and Alberta's wild spaces.

AWA will continue to develop public campaigns for species at risk, with a particular emphasis on umbrella species such as caribou, grizzly bears, native trout, and sage-grouse.

AWA has recently developed a series of school presentations on conservation initiatives for species at risk. In the coming years, we are committed to building and organizing new opportunities to engage with children in classrooms, at organized events and in the field as well as through remote delivery.

Goal: Public Lands Policy

Alberta's public lands are conserved in perpetuity for generations to come, in recognition of the countless vital resources and services they provide.

Public lands issues have been a priority for AWA since the organization was founded. AWA has continuously advocated for a comprehensive public lands policy that is developed in a transparent and inclusive way to reflect all values Albertans have for public lands, however, the government of Alberta has shown no urgency in tackling this issue.

Developing a public lands policy would enable Albertans to become active agents of change in addressing important issues such as access, sales and transfers, surface rights compensation from oil and gas operators to grazing lessees, and conservation. AWA opposes further destruction of native habitat across all Natural Regions of Alberta on public lands, in addition to the sale of public land, removing it from the public realm.

Objective: Increase Public Awareness of the Benefits of Public Lands

AWA will build upon our work over the past five years to create greater awareness of Public Lands and related policies as part of our vision to see reform that will retain public lands and ensure low impact public access.

AWA will continue to promote our Public Lands video series, developed in 2017, to raise awareness of the issues facing public lands, whilst promoting their intrinsic values and promoting public involvement. Some topics addressed in the videos include "What are public lands?", "What are the impacts of the use

and abuse of public lands?”, “What are the laws and regulations that govern public lands?”, and “Can I use public lands?”

Objective: Participate in Upcoming Reviews of Public Lands Policies and Regulations

There are opportunities for AWA to engage when regulations impacting the management of public lands are set to expire.

One example is the Recreational Access Regulation. Originally enacted in 2003 under the *Public Lands Act*, the Recreational Access Regulation was developed with the intent to clarify conditions required by the public to access grazing leases for recreational purposes, however, access issues have worsened significantly. Despite leaseholders being required to provide “reasonable access” under the regulation, numerous grazing leaseholders continue to prevent public access. The regulation expired in March 2017, but was renewed without full stakeholder or public consultation.

By proactively identifying these opportunities and developing campaigns around them, AWA hopes to achieve higher rates of success in improving decisions surrounding public lands management.

Objective: Stop the Further Sale and Conversion of Public Lands

AWA continues to advocate for the responsible management and use of public lands, and remains adamant that these valuable wilderness areas need to reside in perpetuity within the public realm. AWA will continue to oppose the sale and conversion of public land for short term economic gain, and believes that maintaining the ecological integrity of public lands is incredibly important to the health and wealth of our communities.

Conservation Ethic

Albertans have a sense of connectedness to and passion for wild places, wildlife, and Alberta's natural landscapes

Goal: Increase Albertans' connection to wild places

Adventures for Wilderness Program

AWA's Adventures for Wilderness Program is a crucial component of AWA's outreach work that also facilitates and builds important community-based relationships within our Areas of Concern. Over the next 5 years, AWA is looking to enhance programs as far as possible to attract a broader demographic that includes youth, new Canadians and Indigenous peoples. Specific metrics and performance measures are developed and reviewed following each program year.

Goal: Increase Albertans' engagement with conservation issues

Albertans can engage effectively with government, industry, and other sectors of society on matters concerning the wild, natural ecosystems of Alberta

Objective: Increased Transparency and Public Involvement in Decision Making

Currently, there is a lack of transparency, accountability and public inclusion in decisions that affect our public resources (public lands, wildlife and wild waters). Albertans should have the opportunity to be engaged with the respect to the management of public lands and the values they provide. AWA will continue to seek improvements in government transparency and decision making processes.

Represent the Public Interest

AWA will defend watersheds, wildlife, wilderness, and public lands because they are public resources that currently have few organized defenders. We will do this through continued participation in public hearings, consultations, and related processes.

Objective: Support Local Communities

AWA believes in supporting local concerned citizens and grassroots conservation-minded groups in or near our designated Areas of Concern (*Wild Spaces*). By supporting those communities we hope to increase their effectiveness and increase engagement of individuals in issues of protection and conservation. We believe communities can be empowered to lead and that they will effectively demonstrate to decision makers and those in power the values they have for conservation and the protection of wild spaces.

Wilderness Defender Awards

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

Objective: Take an Active Stewardship Role

AWA recognizes stewardship as a frame of mind that accepts the basic premise that if we expect to enjoy wilderness, wildlife and wild waters, we must take responsibility to conserve and protect.

AWA has responsibility as volunteer stewards for Beehive, Plateau Mountain, and the Bighorn Historic Trail; the sites are visited and monitored on a regular basis for damage and improvements. Reports are submitted annually to the government.

In addition, AWA is a co-manager of the Milk River Natural Area and meets regularly to ensure the protection of the area and to participate in management decisions. AWA work in this area is supported by significant volunteer resources.

Goal: Increase Albertans' awareness of conservation issues

Albertans are knowledgeable about the value, ecologically sustainable use, and conservation of wilderness and of natural lands, water, and wildlife

Objective: Practice Effective Advocacy

AWA advocates on behalf of that which cannot communicate for itself, namely nature and wild places. These are invaluable public resources that should be held in trust for this and the following generations, not only for their enjoyment, but for their very survival. Those who should be defending the public trust

– our elected representatives in our provincial and federal democracies – often fail the public by not protecting elements of nature and the environment in general. It has therefore fallen to groups of public minded citizens to take up this cause, the AWA being one. Advocacy occurs at various levels of government, but also can target industry, the media, and even the public itself.

AWA is proactive, not just reactive, in advocating responsible environmental action in those areas that have a direct effect on conservation and the preservation of wilderness in Alberta. Advocacy means adopting a cause and taking a stand striving for what one believes in by challenging and confronting established values and practices.

Tools of advocacy include a suite of communication and education tools. Using these tools effectively includes developing strategic campaigns to reach that goal. AWA has developed a code of environmental advocacy to provide guidelines for what is viewed by AWA as being appropriate in an action plan and sets the rules of conduct for those advocates carrying out the plan.

Tool: Campaigns

Campaigns are an extensive communications effort, spanning a number of weeks and using various channels, to inform public opinion and influence decisions on a specific issue.

Purposes:

- To drive change and increase public awareness and education of the issue at hand.
- Build AWA’s “ownership” of certain issues so that those issues are immediately associated with AWA in the minds of the media and the Alberta public.
- Build capacity and raise the organizational profile for AWA.

Objective: Increase Awareness through Outreach and Communications

Tool: Talks Program

AWA Talks Program provides our members and the general public with opportunities to learn more about AWA’s work and discuss a broad range of environmental topics throughout the province.

Tool: External Outreach

Another component is AWA’s outreach to external communities and organizations. In recent years, AWA has increased our presence in classrooms, at local nature clubs and other organizations, providing presentations on a wide array of topics, from public lands to wildlife species at risk. We have prepared a comprehensive series of videos on Public Lands that are readily available on YouTube. We will create more video recordings for public posting on YouTube in coming years.

Tool: Wild Lands Advocate (WLA)

The *Wild Lands Advocate* (WLA) is AWA’s news journal; published four times a year, WLA is a vital source of information and perspective on Alberta’s wilderness and its conservation. Its information is crucial to informing public debate in Alberta and inspiring the people of this province to care about the health of our landscapes and ecosystems. WLA’s importance here is heightened by the mainstream media’s diminished dedication to reporting on provincial environmental issues.

Tool: Website

AWA’s website (www.albertawilderness.ca) provides comprehensive, easily accessible, factual information about AWA, AWA’s issues and areas of concern, as well as a secure online service for members, donors and program support.

Significant review and updating of website content on AWA's main website AlbertaWilderness.ca began in 2018-2019, and included a review of AWA's Areas of Concern pages. AWA will complete a review of the remaining web pages in the next five years, in particular the wildlife and land use sections.

As needed AWA develops specific campaign websites to increase awareness and access to specific resources related to the campaign. Caribou4Ever.ca is one such website. AWA maintains the website and will until the campaign in progress at this time is concluded.

Tool: Social Media

Social media includes any websites and applications where AWA is provided with the opportunity to directly network and interact with members of the public. The intended purposes of AWA's social media channels are:

- build public understanding of conservation issues in Alberta,
- provide a less formal and more accessible avenue to distribute news about AWA such as upcoming events, public consultation opportunities, and news releases, and to
- create relevance and cachet of AWA in the public sphere.

Regular use of social media channels include: dissemination of news and news releases, sharing of upcoming AWA events, and our work, including *Wild Lands Advocate* article. Campaigns build out specific metrics and targets for social media frequency and use.

Goal: Improve Existing practices, policies and laws

Governments, industry and other sectors of society have policies and laws that protect and value nature

Objective: Strengthen Key Acts, Regulations and Policies

AWA will work to improve and strengthen key Acts, Regulations and Policies in the near-term:

- Strengthen the *Wildlife Act* and *Fish and Wildlife Policy* (see above sections)
- Retain legislated protections in the *Provincial Parks Act*, the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act*, and the *Willmore Wilderness Act*
- Develop a robust *Public Lands Policy* (see above)
- Ensure the implementation of the Green Zone wetlands policy contains measurable goals to maintain and restore wetland area and functions
- Reform Alberta's forest legislation to be more inclusive of ecosystem-based management values
- Ensure subregional plans under the Land Use Framework contain cumulative effects thresholds that are legally binding and science based.

Effective and Credible

AWA's policies and positions are based on the best-available scientific and indigenous knowledge, and are founded in the Precautionary Principle

Goal: Ensure Credibility

Objective: Policies and positions are based on best-available knowledge

Our passion for wilderness, which permeates all of our work, will be supported with defensible facts and rational arguments. Credible sources of information such as peer-reviewed research, Indigenous knowledge, going to the source of information, and Freedom of Information requests will be used in conjunction with the Precautionary Principle in developing AWA's positions and publications. AWA's hearing presentations, written commentary and critiques, position papers, legal challenges, etc. are all based on authoritative science, professional expertise, and thorough research.

AWA recognizes the value in developing further knowledge of current or potential government policies, administrative matters, management plans and the effects of policy and programs on wilderness protection. We will continue developing opportunities for conservation staff to learn, ask questions, and meet with policy experts. We recognize the need for AWA to be rigorous in its effort to focus on policy development that serves the public interest and addresses wilderness, wildlife, watershed, and public lands issues.

Roger Creasey Wilderness Resource Centre

The Wilderness Resource Centre represents the corporate memory for wilderness in Alberta. Our collection consists of a unique compilation of materials about Alberta's wild lands, wild waters, and wildlife: their conservation; the impact of human activities from recreation to urbanization to industry; and what we have done and what we can do through public involvement, government policies and laws to protect our most important natural resources.

Our on-line catalogue database is partially developed, development and growth of the Electronic Wilderness Resource Centre (EWRC) has continued. Our objective to have top of the line technology and storage capacity is in place.

Identifying and removing duplicate files/images on EWRC-M is an ongoing challenge. As we continue to work on the media library, we will add tags, metadata and comments to assist the ability to search for specific items.

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

Goal: Foster Diversity and Inclusivity within the Association

We believe that increasing our age, gender, income, and racial diversity is vital to the success and longevity of the Association. AWA will seek increased diversity among staff, volunteers, and members in an effort to build organizational capacity in an increasingly diverse and complex world.

Build Diversity

AWA will strive to create a culture that fosters inclusivity and is relevant to the lives of people of all cultures and across the spectrum of Alberta's communities. We find ourselves in somewhat of a paradox; while in many ways we work to maintain our heritage of wilderness, water and wildlife, we must also work to remain relevant as understanding and perception of wilderness issues continues to evolve. In addition, our work to protect Alberta's wilderness and wildlife should be conducted in a manner that defends the most vulnerable and marginalized groups within our society.

AWA will actively work to build the diversity of our members and supporters:

- *AWA After Hours*: These events are primarily geared towards building AWA's young member base, although all are welcome. The evening typically incorporates a short conservation "crash course" and activity (e.g. painting, sketching, or even wine tasting), while beer, wine and snacks are served. To encourage new audiences to attend, ticket prices have been kept deliberately low.
- *AWA Talks*: AWA's increased commitment to ensure that a wide diversity of speakers is represented in our programming has resulted in stellar talks seasons and we commit to continuing to promote inclusivity in our speakers moving forward.

Indigenous Peoples

AWA recognizes Alberta's Indigenous Peoples and their traditional place on the land. We accept responsibility in advancing reconciliation efforts and will prioritize building lasting relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities. These efforts to learn and establish connections relate to all aspects of our work, in particular, the need for Canada to establish a system of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), in which Indigenous communities play a major role in the conservation of Canada's landscape.

Goal: Build Capacity

AWA has sufficient resources and capacity to speak independently on wilderness issues

Objective: Collaborate and Build Relationships with External Organizations

Collaborative partnerships with individuals and groups who share a common vision and ideals with AWA are important. When engaging in alliances and coalitions, AWA staff is working to provide leadership and promote effective planning that includes targets and measures of success. Depending on the groups involved, there are times when goals and messaging are clear, roles fall into place naturally, and cooperation is achieved. To help facilitate cooperation and collaboration, AWA considers cooperative interactions that look for results-based actions.

AWA participation in cooperative and collaborative processes, task forces and negotiations with ENGO colleagues, industry, government, and others is based on the following nine guiding principles:

- There will be "true" consensus in decision making - not simply majority voting.
- The terms of reference will be defined by the participants, and clear goals and results will be discussed and determined at the outset.
- Participation will allow self-selection.
- In government-led process, there will be a flexible timeline to allow significant opportunity for public input and to ensure that participants have sufficient time to educate themselves on current issues.

- Information requests will be dealt with in a timely manner. If written information is not available, experts must be brought in to ensure full disclosure of information.
- Adequate resources for undertaking the required scientific and economic investigations will be provided, especially in government or industry-led processes.
- Outcomes of the process will be binding subsequent to consensus.
- When facilitators are engaged, they will be external to the participants.
- In government-led process, there will be transparency and full access to government information will be allowed. A feedback link to public institutions will exist.

External organizations include ENGOS, industry, government, media, communities, and grassroots networks. In developing a more solid network of contacts, we will build on successes to date and seek greater breadth in consultations and opportunities to work collaboratively. We will increase communications through meetings, phone calls and letters; build on media relations successes of the prior year; increase credibility in reporting of issues and AWA goals; and seek cooperative resolution of industrial and protection interests. We will cooperate with, and support as we are able, groups taking the lead in areas that AWA does not.

Recognizing limitations

There are times when important environmental issues cannot be addressed by AWA because they are outside our core focus of protecting large wilderness and we do not have the resources required to participate actively in all environmental issues. As far as possible, we will develop position statements to explain AWA's perspective on major environmental issues that fall outside our primary focus and provide support to those groups taking a lead on the issue.

Developing collegial relationships with industry representatives, elected officials and civil servants is important and encouraged, but will not compromise AWA's ability to speak independently on wilderness, watershed, wildlife and public lands issues.

Objective: Diversify Funding

AWA has developed a broad base of funding that relies most heavily on member and donor support, with fundraising activities being a secondary source and we rely only thirdly on foundations. The ability to remain financially independent is critical to our daily work. AWA is dedicated to securing a long-term approach to funding security in order to provide AWA with a healthy reserve fund.

Lifetime Giving

AWA recognizes all donors and the lifetime giving and commitment they make to the association. All those donors who make a commitment to AWA and have cumulative gifts greater than \$20,000 are recognized on a plaque initiated for AWA's 45th anniversary. They are recognized as Wilderness and Wildlife Benefactors. In 2020, AWA's 55th year, a new plaque recognizing those with lifetime contributions greater than \$55,000 will be created.

Bequests

It is the Board of Directors' hope that individuals, members, and supporters will make a bequest in their will naming a gift to AWA. Bequests make a significant difference to our long-term security and our ability to plan for the future.

Memorial Tributes

Memorial tributes made by family and friends remember those we have lost and contribute to AWA's strength

Objective: Support and Build Human Resources

AWA's current board contains people with extensive expertise in: biology and environmental science, environmental activism, fundraising, environmental law, litigation, accounting, and the art of communicating with the broad public. Many board members have experience in the governance and operation of other non-profit entities.

AWA's core staff has a wide variety of academic backgrounds, ranging from economics, environmental sciences, biology, to political sciences. Casual staff and volunteers provide support with specific expertise and to build capacity.

Infrastructure

In 2015, AWA purchased the Hillhurst Cottage School from the City of Calgary. Since that time, a number of maintenance and upkeep initiatives have been undertaken, including:

- Restoration of the hardwood flooring
- Furnace and heating system upgrade
- Repair of attic damage and upgrade to electrical wiring and main electrical panel
- Replacement and restoration of front entrance stairway
- Lighting replaced with LED fixtures
- Exterior lighting upgrades for security
- Solar panel installation
- Upgrade of downspouts and eavestroughs

General maintenance and upkeep for the building will continue to be an ongoing project. Some donors have directed donations to a building fund that helps with the ongoing maintenance and related costs of the building.

Information Technology has evolved and AWA has continued to develop its Intranet and shared resource systems. Cyber security is addressed with standards of operations that meet required national standards for operating websites and donation sites. Staff are instructed in basic routines of good habits, passwords and two step authentications are used where applicable. Staff do not have access at their personal workstations to sensitive membership demographics or data.

Membership and Supporter Growth

Growth in membership is an ongoing target. We represent a wide diversity of more than 7,000 members and supporters throughout 210 Alberta communities, across Canada and around the world that care about protecting the province's wild places. There was reasonable membership growth this year and we will continue emphasizing growth in youth memberships in the coming years.

Looking Forward

Where we have been and where we will go

We have not achieved our vision, much less our greatest goal which is protection for critical Wild Spaces, yet we are encouraged with the progress we have collectively made. We have struggled with threats, broken promises and wanton disregard for wild places and beings, as humans race to harness the last vestiges of nature. We remain encouraged as our members and supporters continue to be steadfast and to help us remember the value of smaller goals achieved along the road to the ultimate goal of a province-wide system of large, connected protected areas. We know that hope lies in the deeds of solitary individuals who build for all.

The preceding pages provide an overview of our work plans in an exciting and rewarding era. Our resources, both human and financial are allocated based on this action plan which is reviewed annually and revised as necessary to remain relevant and set priorities.

- Christyann Olson, Executive Director



A ferruginous hawk watches her nest from a nearby fence post within Suffield National Wildlife Area

*There is no way to hold back the future.
But we can shape the course of events by
engaging - fully, deeply and passionately -
with the present... this approach is
sometimes referred to as a strategy of "no regrets,"
because the work is worth doing now,
no matter what happens next.*

Candace Savage, Prairie a Natural History

Appendix: Annual Work Plans

2020

1. Establish a conservation ethic on a provincial scale:

Wild Spaces: Fill vital gaps in our protected network, including vital headwaters, underrepresented Natural Regions and habitat for species at risk:

- **Maintain the integrity of Alberta's Provincial Parks system:** halting the delisting of 164 sites (PPs NAs, PRAs) and budget cuts to parks operations, and improving outcomes in the proposed modernization of the *Parks Act*.
- **Caribou:** Participate in caribou Task Force meetings and establish range plans that protect core habitat.
- **Management plans:** Many of Alberta's protected areas are missing management plans; the most critical needs are Rumsey, Caribou Mountains, Suffield National Wildlife Area and Willmore.

Wild Water: Advance the establishment of (instream) environmental flows and ecologically sound watershed restoration.

Wildlife: Advance *Wildlife Act* reforms including updated recovery plans of indicator species at risk to include a strong habitat focus (e.g., caribou, grizzly bear, sage-grouse, and native fish).

Outreach: Establish and renew outreach and extension initiatives that inspire communities and individuals to care about wild spaces, wildlife and a healthy environment.

- Increase our presence in classrooms, at local nature clubs and other organizations, providing presentations on a wide array of topics, from public lands to wildlife species at risk.
- Build out AWA's Adventures for Wilderness Program to inspire individuals to explore and experience Adventures and thereby, continue developing important community-based relationships within our Areas of Concern.
- Continue the development of healthy, active living objectives through appreciation of Wild Natural spaces for renewal and good health.
- Continue our in-person talks and education program in Calgary and Edmonton and build remote access opportunities to other interested members through modern technological platforms and recorded opportunities to learn.
- Maintain excellence in the publication of the Wild Lands Advocate.
- Continually update and refresh the main features of our websites.

2. Focus on regional issues, including:

Public Lands: Continue creating greater awareness of Public Lands and related policy and work to see reform that will retain public lands and ensure low impact public access.

Grasslands: Advance protection of promised SSRP Conservation Areas and participate in working groups within the Prairie Conservation Forum.

Eastern Slopes: Continue subregional planning processes to manage cumulative effects, and secure protection for Prime Protection and Critical Wildlife Zones.

Forests: Advance more ecologically sustainable, transparent and inclusive forest management. Spotlight threats from potentially higher allocations and from ongoing pine beetle surge cuts.

Wetlands: Implementation of Green Zone wetlands policy with measureable goals to maintain and restore wetland area and functions.

3. Implement conservation outcomes in policy and regulatory avenues:

Biodiversity: Maintain and restore biodiversity through Alberta's national and international commitments (Aichi Target 11)

Cumulative Effects: Model cumulative effects to land and water to reduce and manage impacts within science-based thresholds. Integrate processes to avoid, minimize and reclaim linear disturbance from multiple land uses, including motorized recreation and industrial development.

Energy: Seek responsible decision making in Alberta's transition to a green energy economy; increase public awareness and question projects that will have significant environmental impacts (e.g. energy projects on native prairie and the parkland and in critical habitat for threatened species). Continue supportive efforts for those working directly to monitor and achieve orphan well recovery and restoration of landscapes.

4. Maintain Regional, National and International ties to colleagues working on objectives and outreach that is relevant to achieving AWA's conservation goals

Alberta Water Council: Continue our role on the Board of Directors representing ENGO sector and as Chair of Water Caucus.

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC): maintain membership - AWA's Cliff Wallis is a Director on the Forest Stewardship Council (Canada) Board as one of two environmental chamber representatives.

Great Plains Conservation Network: Continue working with the GPCN - AWA hosts and maintains the GPCN website at www.gpcn.net and AWA Board member Cliff Wallis sits as Chair for the group.

IUCN Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative: The initiative is in the process of being revitalized and AWA will participate in TGCI discussions on an ad hoc basis.

Hay Zama Committee: Maintain membership within the committee, a multi-stakeholder group that includes Indigenous groups, conservation groups (including AWA) and industry.

Milk River Management Society: continue as a member and treasurer.

Prairie Conservation Forum: Participate in working groups and on the Board of Directors of the Prairie Conservation Forum.