

# 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 2025-2030

## 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 board and staff 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: Beaver dam near Big Hill Springs Provincial Park, DA Donnelly (2024)



Alberta Wilderness Association

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# INTRODUCTION

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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 60 years of success, AWA 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

### **Eco-focused**

We recognize the inherent importance of nature and humankind's place in it.

### **Integrity**

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

### **Collaboration**

We develop relationships with individuals and communities through active listening, openness, and free access to information.

### **Participation**

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

### **Tenacity**

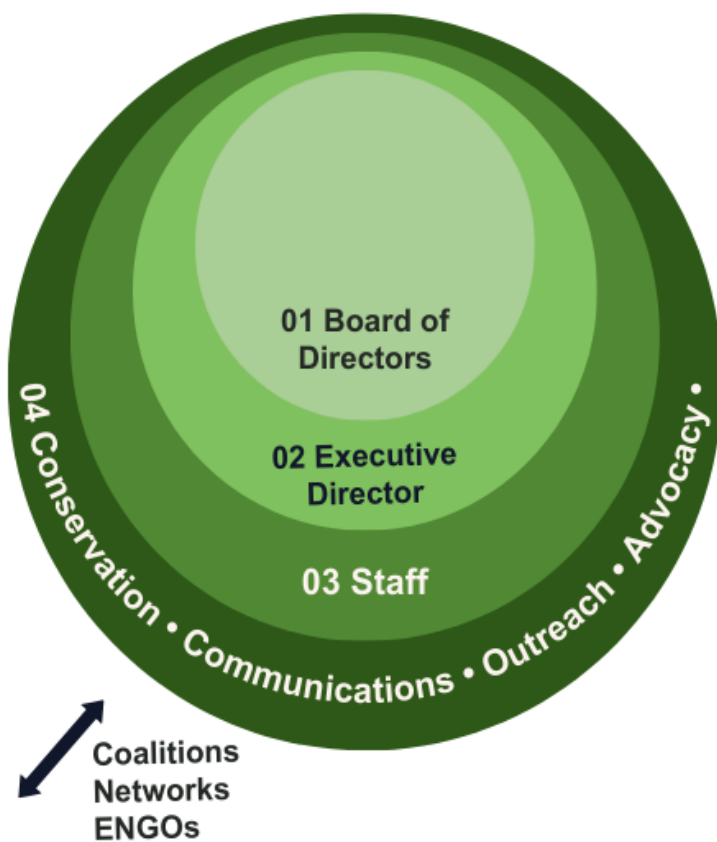
We advocate for nature in a manner true to our principles.

# 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 through programs that create awareness and inspire communities and individuals to care.



## AWA Organization Chart



### 01 Governance

Board of directors, elected by membership.

### 02 Management

Executive director, appointed by the board of directors.

### 03 Staff

Conservation specialists, communications, outreach, outdoor education, finance, administration. Salaried, casual and contract staff.

### 04 Service Delivery

Conservation, development, support, volunteerism, education, stewardship, advocacy.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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*“What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another ...” — Mahatma Gandhi*

## **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 Wild Alberta.

### *... 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:
  - Representative protection of Alberta’s six natural regions
  - Large, natural core areas that serve as the foundation of the network
  - Buffer zones for protected areas
  - Connectivity between protected areas, including rivers and migratory pathways
  - Inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and leadership
- 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 are connected to Alberta’s wild places and wildlife
- Albertans effectively engage 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 seeks increased diversity among staff, volunteers, and members to build organizational capacity in an increasingly diverse and complex world.
- AWA has sufficient resources to speak independently on wilderness issues.

# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: 2025-2030

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Specific priority plans are developed annually; metrics and outcomes are published in the Annual Report.

## Effectively Protected Wilderness

Alberta establishes a network of protected areas. This includes:

- a) Representative and effective protection of Alberta's 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 leadership and management.

### Goal: Improve Alberta's protected areas network

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

#### Objective: Conserve Wild Alberta

AWA uses the name Areas of Concern to refer to areas that are critical to a network of protected representative landscapes in Alberta. These create the basis of our Wild Alberta map and 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.

AWA will reassess its existing Areas of Concern to understand changes in human footprint and ecological values, and to determine priority areas for conservation work moving forwards.

**Boreal Forest:** Alberta's Boreal Forest Natural Region covers 381,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 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. Large landscape conservation with a focus on caribou recovery
2. Improving water quality and quantity with a focus on fish species at risk (Arctic grayling, Athabasca rainbow trout, etc.)
3. Modernization of Boreal wetland and forest policies

**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. Participate and advocate within the Land Use Planning process for watershed and wilderness protection
2. Advocate for appropriate levels and types of visitor use on the Eastern Slopes
3. Engage in campaigns to challenge government policies (i.e. OHV use, forestry, mining)

**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) Participate and advocate within the Land Use Planning process for watershed and wilderness protection
- 2) Engage in campaigns to challenge government policies (i.e. OHV use, forestry, mining, oil and gas, gravel extraction)

**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. In Alberta, only 1.25 percent of grasslands are protected. 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. Continue to defend against public land sales of and industrial development in native grasslands
2. Collaborate with allies to promote the designation of plains bison as wildlife and spaces for their rematriation
3. Push for the promotion of public lands policy that protects grasslands and provides appropriate public foot access
4. Advocate for new protected area designations

**Parkland:** The Parkland Natural Region is 60,747 km<sup>2</sup> 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) Continue to defend against public land sales of and industrial development in native parkland
- 2) Push for the promotion of public lands policy that protects parkland and provides appropriate public foot access
- 3) Advocate for new protected area designations

**Objective:** Use government commitments to achieve increased protections

AWA believes that effective land use planning is critical to conservation.

#### **Land Use Framework:**

Completion of sub-regional plans with the designation of new protected areas is necessary before new industrial projects should be considered.

AWA is supportive of various provincial and federal commitments on climate change and biodiversity conservation.

- 1) Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Targets
- 2) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

**Objective:** Improve water conservation and management for the protection of aquatic ecosystems.

AWA is committed to the protection of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. Industrial forestry and expanded OHV use has devastated the watersheds and aquatic ecosystems of southern Alberta.

AWA's priorities for water include:

- 1) Advocating for water management plans which protect instream flows and support healthy aquatic systems as emphasized as a priority under the Land Use Framework

- 2) Continue to advocate an end to industrial forestry south of Highway 1
- 3) Continue to play a lead role in the protection of Alberta's waterways.

## Goal: Recover Species at Risk

Wildlife decline is reversed through legally enforced habitat protections and recovery plans 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.

Objective: Achieve legislated habitat protection for species at risk

Our priorities include:

- 1) Large landscape protection including watersheds and aquatic ecosystems
- 2) Using all legal and policy tools to protect individual species (i.e. SARA)
- 3) Advocating for new Fish and Wildlife policy and modernizing the Wildlife Act
- 4) Advocating against government policies that negatively impact wildlife.

## Goal: Alberta reduces its contribution to global climate change and embraces the renewable energy transition

Our work on climate change is focused on large landscape conservation and nature-based solutions.

Our priorities include:

- 1) Advocating to protect our wild spaces from all forms of industrial activity
- 2) Continuing to advocate for a reduction and restoration of the fossil fuel footprint in Alberta
- 3) Collaborating with lead ENGOs and other allies to reform the framework for regulating energy development in Alberta.

## Conservation Ethic

Albertans are connected to and have a passion for wild places, wildlife, and Alberta's natural landscapes.

## Goal: Increase Albertans' connection to wild places and knowledge of conservation issues

**Adventures for Wilderness (A4W) Program:** AWA's A4W 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. AWA's priorities for A4W are to:

- 1) Increase Albertans' connections to wild places through the Adventures for Wilderness program and our outreach activities
- 2) Increase Albertans' engagement with conservation through campaigns, outreach stewardship opportunities and collaborations with local communities and other allies
- 3) Continue to expand our role as influencers in the conservation community
- 4) Continue to engage Albertans through a variety of communication channels.

## Effective and Credible

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

### **Goal: Continue to Build an Organisation that is Effective and Credible**

We accomplish this by:

- 1) Using the best-available knowledge
- 2) Fostering diversity and inclusivity within our membership and staff
- 3) Modernizing processes and use of technology, including access to expanded digital content
- 4) Collaborating and expanding relationships with external organisations
- 5) Continuing to diversify our funding streams with an emphasis on our supporters
- 6) Adapting our premises for future growth, while recognizing the heritage status of our building
- 7) Continuing to build a capable and engaged workforce.

# LOOKING FORWARD

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*Where we have been and where we will go...*

We have not yet achieved our vision, much less our greatest goal, which is protection for critical Wild Spaces, but we continue the good fight. Conservation work may seem endless and sometimes hopeless. We struggle against industry and government apathy and broken promises but are encouraged by the active engagement of Albertans who treasure our wilderness and wildlife. We value every goal attained, no matter how small, as we know progress is often hampered by other interests. We will strive to inform and engage and push to achieve our vision with the ultimate goal of a province-wide system of large, connected protected areas.

AWA will work towards these strategic goals through an annual evaluation of progress and setting of priorities.

- Deborah Donnelly, Executive Director



*Bombus centralis* on delphiniums at the AWA office.

*There was a time when the air didn't  
smell of greed and gasoline, when the  
water wasn't gritty between your teeth,  
the soil wasn't paved over, and the forests  
weren't stumps, sawdust and sediment.*

*~ Lorne Fitch, Streams of Consequence*

We hope to get back to that time!