

# 60 Years Defending

**I**t all started around a kitchen table. It was 1965 and a group of folks gathered to discuss how Alberta's land policy was destroying, not preserving, the province's public wild spaces. It was time to take action. Floyd and Karen Stromstedt, Marian and Bill Michalsky, and Steve and Helen Dixon started speaking out, gaining support from local farmers, teachers and community leaders interested in conserving Alberta's wildlife and its habitat. This was the start of Alberta Wilderness Association. In 1968, during a meeting in Lundbreck, Alberta, local outfitter and rancher William (Willie) Michalsky became AWA's first board president. The presidency and board of directors was then, as it is now – voluntary.

In 1969, AWA incorporated and began seeking new, broader ways to raise awareness about the state of Alberta's wilderness, and to spread a message through the media and its own publications and through participation in community and government meetings and programs. AWA's goals are today what they were in 1965: protection of Alberta's wild lands, wildlife and watersheds. Its work is to communicate these goals with the public, sister conservation groups, government and industry, as well as through education programs that connect Albertans to wild spaces and encourage increasing numbers of people to speak out in their defence. Passion, integrity and participation are seen as key to this advocacy work.

Relationships allow AWA to assume what may be ambitious projects requiring local support, partnership cooperation and a committed volunteer base for success.

## Mirroring the past

It seems ironic that, as AWA steps into its 60th year of conservation efforts, the organization faces one of the same major challenge it started with: defending the Eastern Slopes. When AWA first got going, the organization prepared for the Eastern Slopes hearings that would set a framework to conserve the Rockies and their foothills. Work began in 1970 when volunteers talked directly with community members to learn what people thought best for the future of the region.

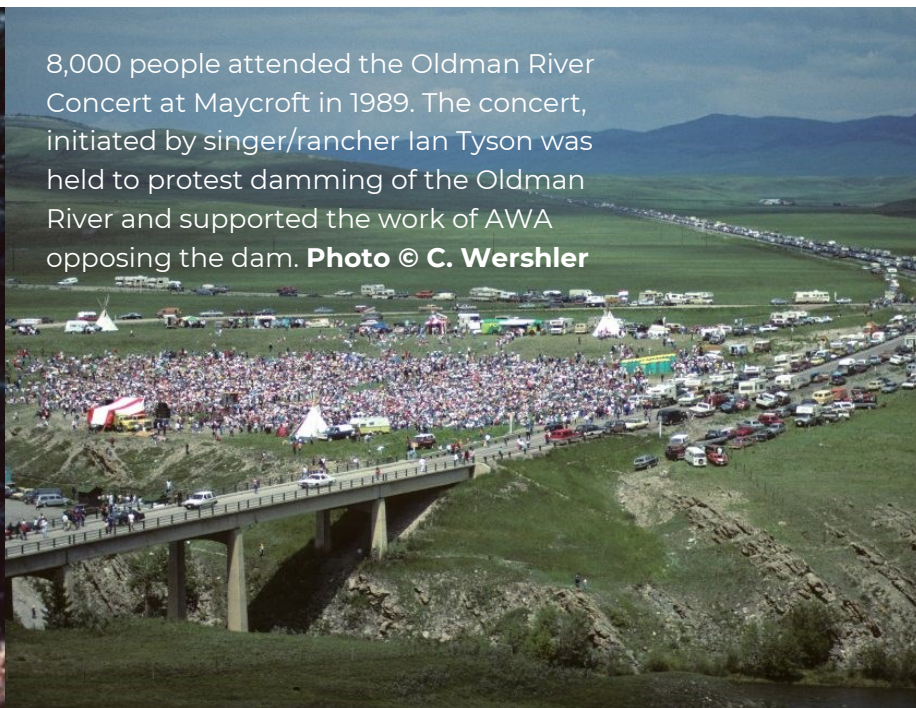
AWA found the means to hire a writer to consolidate people's collected ideas into two books to present at the formal Eastern Slopes hearings in 1973. The hearings were well attended, and their recommendations strongly favoured conservation of wildlife habitats, watersheds and aesthetic values. They led to many areas being zoned for protection in the ensuing 1977 *Eastern Slopes Policy*, and while not all sensitive and important regions were safeguarded from development, the hearings were still a significant success for a fledgling group's first undertaking. AWA's forward thinking approach based on vision, communication, sound science and determination, became the organization's modus operandi since proving its worth in this first major public undertaking — one we are determined to repeat in the current fight to defend the Eastern Slopes. 🍃

*-This is one part of an edited article originally compiled by Vivian Pharis for the AWA website, with the help of Sameer Dossa and Melissa Tierney.*



William Michalsky outfitter, rancher and AWA founding president on horse pack trip in the Castle.

Photo © AWA



8,000 people attended the Oldman River Concert at Maycroft in 1989. The concert, initiated by singer/rancher Ian Tyson was held to protest damming of the Oldman River and supported the work of AWA opposing the dam. Photo © C. Wershler

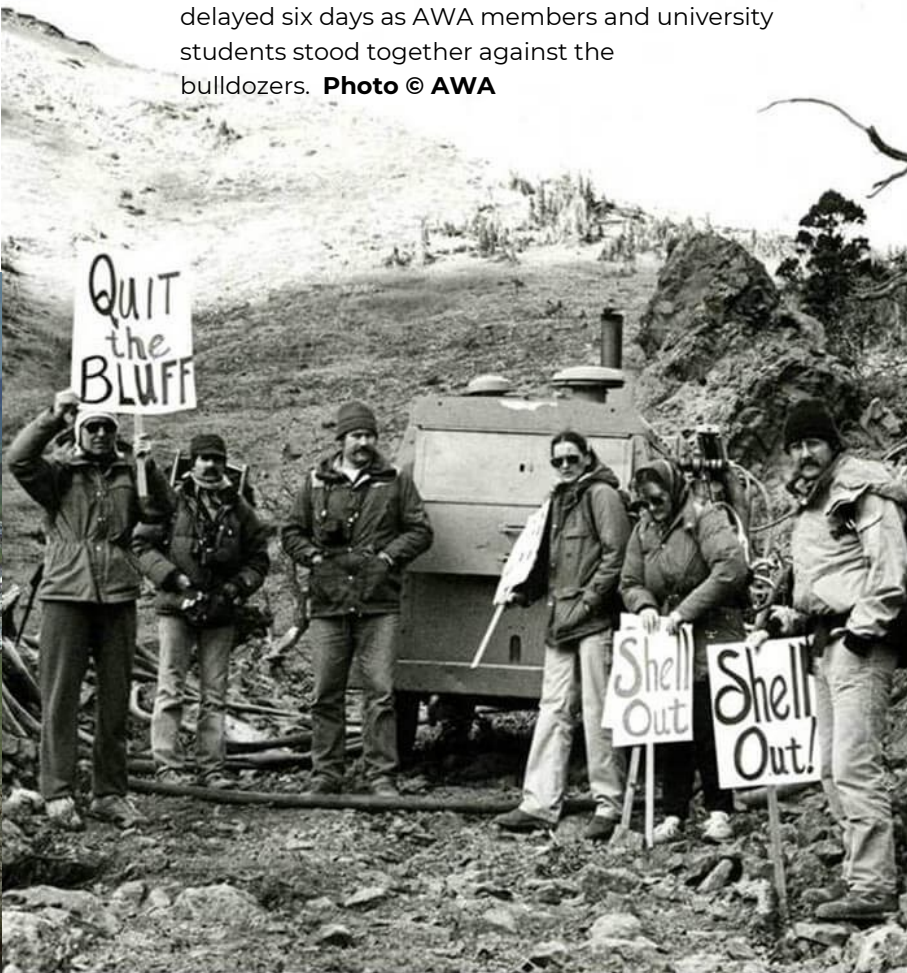


# Wild Alberta



A 1979 trip to Job Pass. By then, AWA was already 14 years old. There are so many impressive achievements by Alberta Wilderness Association over the years, that it would be impossible to highlight them all in one magazine feature. So much of the work happened behind the scenes and all of it was carried out by dedicated people who care very much about keeping Alberta wild and connected, forever. **Photo © V. Pharis.**

In the 1980s, AWA opposed the drilling of Corner Mountain in the Castle area. The development was delayed six days as AWA members and university students stood together against the bulldozers. **Photo © AWA**



AWA worked with industry in the 1990's to gain protection for the Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve, to prevent further commercial development and open pit mining in Kananaskis Country and on the boundary of Jasper National Park. AWA remains a steward of Plateau Mountain to this day. **Photo © N. Douglas**

