# Wild Lands Advocate

BY ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2025

**BIRDS AND THE BEETLES:**
**Pollinators are not just bees, and their decline or loss signals a hurting ecosystem.**

ALBERTAWILDERNESS.CA

# Contents

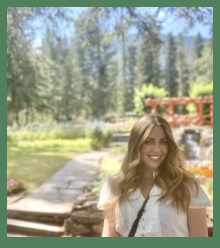
**Spring/March 2025 | Vol. 33, No. 1**



**Cover Photo:** While walking through a meadow of wild geranium, delphinium and other colourful native flowers in 2006, I came across a handsome beetle enjoying a sunny perch. Its beauty and its relationship with the flower seemed so complete that I felt there was little more to tell when Amy asked me to write about the photo for this issue of the WLA. Still, the encounter that day triggered memories of Rachael Carson's 1960s warnings of the fragility of nature and I was reminded of how absolutely good it was to see this insect relishing droplets of water and pollen, as insects have always done. As I walked further, my thoughts wandered to how endless the need is for loud voices from fearless individuals and scientists, willing to take stands, from people like Rachael Carson and the brave founders of the AWA. For 60 years AWA has shared a vision for a safe and healthy environment and it has inspired people to bravely stand, voice their concerns, and insist on making a difference. Consider for a moment how 60 years of the AWA and a fearless conservation movement forged the path toward the land protections and environmental safeguards we know now. What would we see today without those who stood up and spoke out? Today in 2025 we are witnessing unprecedented attacks by our own governments on hard-won protective measures and policies researched and written with dedication, collaboration and mindful science. Will it mean the dismantling of decades of hard-won environmental accomplishments? The challenge remains the same now as it was then, and I believe those who care will stand up once again and the conservation movement will be heard.

– Christyann Olson, former AWA executive director

**Editorial Note:** Dear readers,



Welcome to spring! We are planning a host of activities as the season changes and weather warms, from a talk on pollinators at AWA on April 22 to our annual crocus hunt and many more adventures. Head to our website to see our event lineup: www.albertawilderness.ca/events

– Amy Tucker, Outreach + Communications 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.

Wild Lands Advocate is published four times each year, by Alberta Wilderness Association. The opinions expressed by the authors in this publication are not necessarily those of AWA. The editor reserves the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles and letters submitted. Comments and questions may be directed to outreach@abwild.ca.

See the contact details below to subscribe.

**Spring/March 2025**
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Printing: CBN Commercial Solutions

MIX Paper FSC® C013747



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Federally Registered Charity
Number: 118781251RR0001
ISSN 1192-6287

# Saving the Bee(tles)

## By Kennedy Halvorson

***"If one could conclude as to the nature of the Creator from a study of creation, it would appear that God has an inordinate fondness for beetles."***

***- John B. S. Haldane***

Photo © K. Halvorson

### A note to readers: Pollinators are not just bees!

In fact, the first suspected pollinator was Earth's favorite type of insect (constituting a quarter of all species on the planet), the mighty beetle, celebrated on the front cover of the magazine. Many animals provide pollination services, including flies, moths, butterflies, ants, wasps, birds, bats, rodents, lizards, primates, and marsupials — bees just happen to be the most common and often effective floral visitor. They are also the most researched for my purposes here, but please keep in mind these many other wonderful pollinating species!

You know their plight. You've heard about their threats, declines, and their ecological and economic importance. You know their need for robust ecosystems and global food security. People love pollinators, more specifically, bees. It's hard to think of another type of organism with such widespread public support.

Just one iteration of the #savethebees hashtag has over 2.9 million posts on Instagram, and while the phrase is unfortunately often complicit in "bee-washing" campaigns, it helpfully illustrates my point. If anecdotes aren't enough, research reverberates the same message; the public overwhelmingly thinks pollinators are important and should be protected.

Much like you, I agree. I love pollinators. I think they are the coolest. I read all the same articles, consume all these repetitive messages; "how to save the bees," "10 ways to protect pollinators," "make your garden bee-friendly this summer," "grow these native plants pollinators will love," "join no-mow May," etc.

These articles will reiterate individual actions, which people are eager to implement. And we're becoming more educated on pollinator issues, we're planting bee gardens with native flora,

leaving leaf and plant litter for nesting and habitat, going chemical-free, pulling household pesticides out of the lawn care rotation. All these things are meaningful — at a local level, I promise your pollinators appreciate it, and importantly, engaging with nature in such an intimate way is just generally good for your wellbeing. However, it is not enough.

But what more can we do? We are past awareness. The threats faced by pollinators need to be tackled systemically, and those ideally positioned to do so are the federal and provincial governments.

### Government pollinator policy

Native pollinators are not explicitly addressed at either the federal or provincial levels. In fact, most mentions of the word "bee" within government policy imply non-native honey bees, or in some cases, are not referring to bees at all.

Under the *Species at Risk Act,* the majority of pollinator species have had no formal assessment. Of the 16 assessed and present in the province, 63 percent are without and/or overdue for recovery strategies. No action plans have been completed. There are no provincial-level status assessments of pollinators. This reflects existing taxonomic biases in conservation research and efforts; insects are consistently underrepresented, underappreciated, and threatened. In the absence of explicit native pollinator protection legislation, our wild bees, flies, moths, butterflies, beetles, and other pollinators are left without real targeted support from our governments. And on a global context, that means we are behind.

### Canada lags its peers

In North America, the U.S. and Mexico have had national pollinator protection strategies in place since 2015 and 2021 respectively. Further abroad, 34 nations including Belgium, Colombia, England, Ireland, France, Nigeria, Norway, the Netherlands, and Spain have enacted similar plans and initiatives to protect pollinators. Pollinator legislation also need not be restricted to just the federal level; in the U.S., 32 states have their own subnational plans coordinated within the country's national strategy, with more developed each year. With such a large body of international examples to draw on, there should be no reason Canada can not endorse similar policies — if anything, the process should be easier with the ability to learn from spearheading nations' challenges and successes.

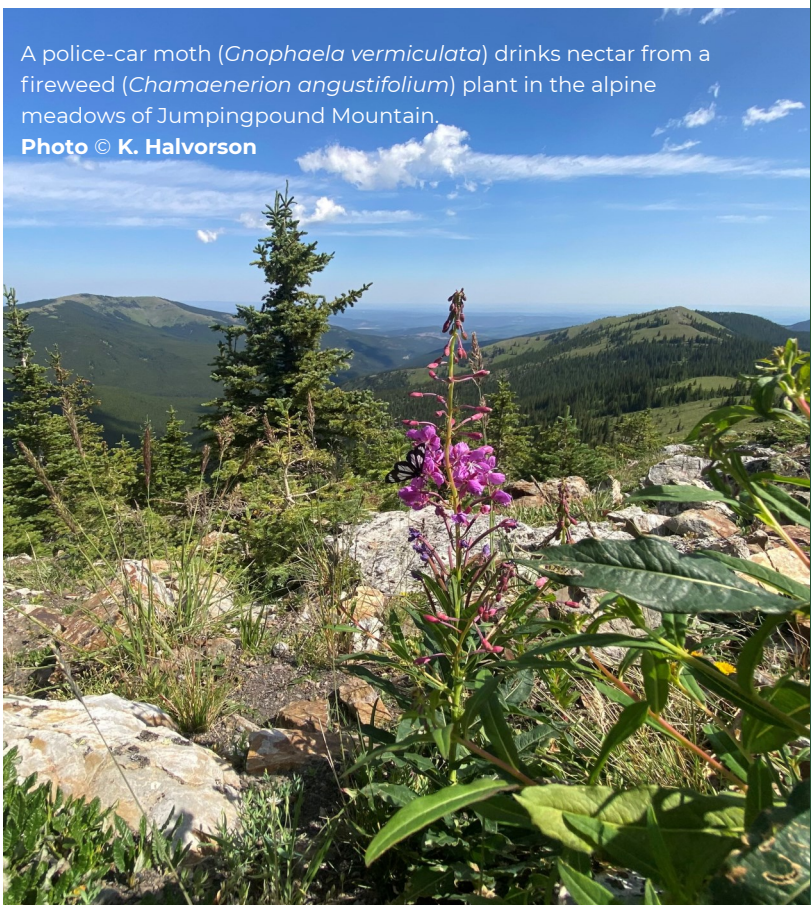
### What could a policy look like?

The core principles of an effective Canadian pollinator policy should:

- Focus on the health of wild, native pollinator communities.
- Be supported, feasible, and science-based.
- Overcome Canada's decentralized system of governance.

International and Canada-specific policy recommendations already exist to inform the development of pollinator protection legislation and identify four major threats that must be addressed: habitat loss, non-native species, pathogens, and pesticides. The recommendations for Canada were published in 2023 by over 30 experts of diverse professional and personal backgrounds, who considered both the utility and feasibility of almost a hundred proposed solutions for protecting pollinator populations, as well as knowledge gaps and research priorities. Good policy would address non-native species and their impacts, increasing regulations, monitoring, and reporting on movement of materials potentially containing exotic species from other regions, and subsidizing the removal of invasive plants already established.

For pesticides, policy recommendations that were both strongly supported and considered very feasible by experts included eliminating the cosmetic use of pesticides for homeowners, municipalities, and other sectors within the province, and reducing the number of household insecticides available for purchase by the average, untrained person. Establishing a bee-friendly certification for farms, adopting targeted crop insurance programs, increasing investments in Integrated Pest Management, and making technicians specialized in pollinator best



A police-car moth (*Gnophaela vermiculata*) drinks nectar from a fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) plant in the alpine meadows of Jumpingpound Mountain.
**Photo © K. Halvorson**

management practices available and accessible would support and protect producer livelihoods while better protecting pollinators.

To help address pathogens, experts recommended regulating the use, distribution, and disposal of commercially managed pollinators. Colonies should be independently tested and confirmed as pathogen-free, and movement should be closely tracked and reported. Excluding honey bees who are already widely introduced, use of other managed pollinators like bumble bee, leafcutter, and mason bee species should be limited to within their native ranges. All precautions must be taken to ensure reproducing individuals do not escape into native habitats.

Policy required to combat habitat loss could take a variety of approaches; in an agricultural context, increasing producer access to seeds free from pesticide applications and incentivizing the adoption of less-intensive practices would create landscapes more accommodating to pollinators. Supporting native plant nurseries and regional seed libraries/exchanges while eliminating invasive plants from marketed seed mixes would improve biological and genetic diversity and help restore habitats. The experts also were highly supportive of initiatives that protect and expand habitat, particularly within pollinator hotspots. Planting native flower mixes along anthropogenic corridors like roads and utility lines to increase ecological connectivity for pollinators is another great example of how policy could help address habitat loss.

A dogbane leaf beetle pictured in June 2023. **Photo © D. Donnelly**

### Alberta's next advantage

Alberta is a prime candidate for the country's first successful pollinator protection legislation.

Almost 10 million acres or one-fifth of the total cropland in Alberta grow field and greenhouse crops that either require or benefit (through increased yield and nutrients) from pollinators. The farm gate value for greenhouse crops alone was estimated at over $140 million in 2023. Canola, the largest field crop requiring pollination, has yearly exports valued in the billions. Ensuring strong protections for pollinators is not just a good environmental choice, it's an economic one, as providing sufficient and effective pollination for these crops represents both larger and higher quality yields for Alberta farmers, and reduced input costs required to maintain ecological and farm health. Imagine for a moment the worst-case (and very real) scenario – in places where pollinators have declined substantially, hand pollination by humans is required for crop production. Laborious, time-intensive, and costly, it can not be overstated what a loss the freely provided services of pollinators would be to Alberta agriculture.

From an ecological perspective, over a third of Canada's bee diversity, 375 species, exists in Alberta. The province is also home to 2,700 beetle, 2,000 fly, and 2,500 butterfly and moth species, which means increasing pollinator protections here is meaningful for biodiversity at a national scale. While not every single one of these species functions as a pollinator, they fulfill many other important ecological functions that are similarly threatened by a lack of protection. According to the *Wild Species: The General Status of Species in Canada* in Alberta, 22 percent of beetle, 16

## Did You Know: Ontario had a short-lived attempt to help pollinators

In what was an unprecedented commitment by a provincial government in Canada to protect pollinators, the strongly supported, but ultimately ill-fated plan (known as the *Ontario Pollinator Health Action Plan*) was enacted in 2016 to support healthy populations, ecosystems resilience, food system sustainability, and the economy.

The quiet termination of this plan two years later came as a shock and violated protocol, best summarized by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario:

"[The] Agriculture Ministry did not notify or consult the public on this decision through the Environmental Registry, as required under the *Environmental Bill of Rights*, 1993. As a result, pollinator researchers and the public were unaware that the Pollinator Plan and its targets had been cancelled."

## "Beewashing" is a thing

Beewashing is a type of greenwashing which advertises a product or initiative as supporting wild bee or pollinator populations without the appropriate due-diligence and research.

percent of bee, 23 percent of fly, and 11 percent of butterfly and moth species are considered vulnerable to critically imperilled.

Alberta's native pollinators coevolved with regional plants; together they are foundational to the function of ecosystems throughout the province. Enacting robust pollinator protections does not just serve wild populations; Alberta is home to 40 percent of the nation's honey bee colonies which would also stand to benefit. Charismatic though they are, honey bees are non-native and managed like livestock for their pollination abilities, and their production of honey, wax, and other bee products. Similar to other livestock species, disease prevalence and transfer are a key concern in their husbandry and represent the greatest threat to beekeepers' livelihoods. Increased regulation and reporting on the movement of managed bees around the province is beneficial as it can improve rapid reporting and response to disease outbreaks, limiting the extent and severity of impacts in both honey bees and native pollinator populations. Reducing stressors like pesticides and other agrochemicals would keep honey bee populations healthier, which in turn allows them to fight off parasites and disease better and reduce transmission into native populations. Increased floral availability and diversity reduces competition with wild species and benefits honey bees as well, who much like us, need variety in their diets.

Alberta needs, deserves, and wants robust pollinator protections. Six cities, representing over 1.7 million Albertans and 38 percent of the province's population, are already registered Bee Cities, demonstrating strong support at the municipal level for pollinator conservation and protection.

The agricultural, economic, environmental, and societal co-benefits of adopting the policy recommendations into formal legislation would be substantial for the province, and it is an action that is desperately needed.

**What can you do?**

Do what you can locally. Reduce how much you mow, stop using pesticides, switch to a native lawn, don't swat, etc. And, consider contacting your provincial and federal representatives. Send them all the articles you read (including this one), emphasize how much you love pollinators, and highlight their immense importance to our landscapes and societies. Most critically, demand their legislated protection.

## Spring always comes

*-By Kris Unger*

I find walking wild
-content through woods
one of the finest
of pleasures.

I cross rivers and keep going
walk the floodscape
the hills
so dense the trees
today I climb one

a pine apart
with prospect
and good vantage

a fine tree
crackle-lush with lichen
bark and brach

like a porcupine
I muse
as the prickles
entangle

and then nestle
so high I sway
in the wind
Raven laugh-cackles
at me in
this old one

this tree
among trees
happy crowd
sun wind aplenty

tangled roots in soft rocks
wait for spring warmth and rains
spring always comes
rain always comes

and sun warms the rocks
and the living.

# A Different Future Is Possible

**BY PHILLIP MEINTZER**

Living in Alberta, it seems like we are constantly bombarded by claims that the continued extraction of natural resources — typically oil and gas — is necessary to maintain some notion of the "good life." Recent ad campaigns from both the Alberta government and Cenovus further emphasize this narrative by attempting to paint a picture of life without fossil fuels as dark, cold, and expensive.

These institutions want us to believe that a reduced standard of living is the only possible future in a world without further extraction, despite a growing body of evidence that suggests otherwise. But if we want to build an alternative future for this province and the people who live here, it can be helpful to imagine what that future may look like if we decide to take the path of least extraction.

Alberta's settler colonial history may have been propelled by resource extraction, but that wasn't always the case. The first oil well to be drilled in what is now Alberta (formerly the Northwest Territories) wasn't until 1902, and the first commercial oilsands mine wasn't until 1967. Our history with oil and gas is barely more than 120 years old, yet before colonization, Indigenous Peoples lived on this land for millennia in relative harmony with the natural world. Things weren't always this way, and things don't have to stay this way forever.

It's important to recognize that humans, like other species, will always use nature in some way to meet our needs. However, our relationship with nature can be more or less sustainable depending on the economic system. Right now, everything is geared towards turning nature into money and we are running out of nature. That's why sustainability is only possible if we can respect that the Earth has ecological limits and that all human activities need to equitably meet our needs without stepping beyond those boundaries.

A recent study published by Jason Hickel and Dylan Sullivan found that we could provide decent living standards for 8.5 billion people (more than Earth's current population) using only 30 percent of our current resource and energy consumption if we shifted away from profit growth and toward a needs-based economy. Decent living standards would include universal access to nutritious food, modern housing, public education, internet, and healthcare, among other essentials.

This research demonstrates that the problem here isn't a lack of resources. Hickel and Sullivan showed that we are wasting 70 percent of our energy and resources while many are still struggling to feed themselves and find secure housing. We have more than enough to meet everyone's needs, and we certainly don't need to expand our extractive footprint. The real problem is how those resources are distributed and whether people have access to the things they need to survive. Meeting human needs and protecting the environment must go hand in hand.

**"Things weren't always this way, and things don't have to stay this way forever."**

Let's use the problem of oil and gas cleanup in Alberta as an example. The cleanup and reclamation costs of oil and gas disturbance in Alberta might be as high as $230 billion according to internal estimates from the Alberta Energy Regulator. Doing some quick math, if we divide $230 billion by a reasonable salary of $80,000 per year, that could employ roughly 290,000 Albertans across 10 years' worth of cleanup work.

By contrast, there are around 130,000 people employed by the oil and gas industry in Alberta today. That's less than half of the people we could employ for cleanup and restoration work. Reclaiming ecosystems could be a sensible way to provide good-paying jobs for more workers while repairing the harms caused by extraction — a win for people and a win for the environment.

Unfortunately, funding restoration work is only possible if the Alberta government and the Alberta Energy Regulator collect the money companies owe to the province to cover cleanup costs, which they are refusing to do. Focusing on the oilsands specifically, Alberta has only collected $912 million — less than one percent — towards $130 billion in estimated cleanup costs.

While this may be an oversimplification, I think it's illustrative of the opportunities available to pursue

alternative economies that prioritize the protection of Alberta's landscape, without negatively impacting working people and their ability to support themselves. Expanding oil and gas production isn't the only path forward for Alberta. We have other options, like renewable energy, if only our leaders weren't held captive by corporate interests.

In response to the recently announced emissions cap for the oil and gas industry, the Alberta government launched a new ad campaign under the banner of "Scrap the Cap." The premier claims that we will lose 150,000 jobs because of the emissions cap, but a conflicting report from Clean Energy Canada shows that a net-zero Canada would create 700,000 more energy jobs due to growth in renewables. Just because we lose jobs in one sector doesn't mean we can't create new jobs in sustainable industries and support workers through the transition with subsidized retraining programs or other incentives.

What's more, evidence shows that switching to renewables also comes with the added benefit of reducing household costs. Research from the Canada Electricity Advisory Council found that switching to a net-zero electricity grid will save Canadian households an average of $1,500 per year. Renewables can provide more jobs, save people money, and help us reduce fossil fuel emissions. It's a win across the board, and yet the Alberta government has decided to prop up the oil and gas industry by imposing restrictions on its main competitor. Meanwhile, other jurisdictions are leading the way.

A wind turbine in southern Alberta in 2023.

**Photo © L. Wallis**

While not without its flaws, China's leadership on renewable energy shows what's possible when you have the political will to take environmental issues seriously and dedicate the resources needed to deal with the problem.

In 2023 alone, China added more solar energy capacity than the United States and Canada have constructed in their entire history. This past July, it was reported that almost two-thirds of global wind and solar projects currently under construction were being built in China, more than the rest of the world combined. The same story showed that China was on track to reach 1,200 gigawatts of wind and solar capacity by the end of 2024, six years ahead of its 2030 target. Canada, by contrast, has installed roughly 22 gigawatts.

China's move to renewables has been driven by a commitment by the Chinese government to build an "ecological civilization" as part of its political strategy back in 2007. The intent is to pursue economic development that occurs within planetary boundaries and ensures the harmonious existence between humanity and nature. As a result, China has become a world leader not only in renewable energy, but also the expansion of railways, the production of electric vehicles, and the reforestation of desert areas.

Alberta could be a world leader in renewables and sustainable development, but our government is choosing not to do so. This locks us into a future that's worse for the environment, worse for working people, but great for fossil fuel companies

Despite what our leaders say, the alternative future is a brighter one. Evidence shows that we can protect the environment and meet human needs while using less resources, spending less money, and maybe even having more free time for ourselves. Even the United Nations recently stated that: "sustainable wellbeing for all cannot be achieved by an economic system that focuses solely on economic growth." The path of least extraction is open to us, but it will take a massive, organized, and sustained effort on behalf of all of us to force our leaders to change ways. A greener future awaits us if we are ready to demand it.

Alberta's woodland caribou are threatened largely due to habitat destruction.

**Photo © M. Bradley**

**Species at Risk Act: Part 4**

# The Success – or Failure – to Protect Canada's Species at Risk Comes Down To Cooperation

**BY NATHAN SCHMIDT**

Canada's *Species at Risk Act (SARA*) will mark its 25th anniversary in 2027. Its implementation came with hope as Canada's first attempt at dedicated species-at-risk legislation. But this milestone will be marked by 25 years of accelerated biodiversity loss caused largely by governments across Canada ignoring their responsibility to address the long-term effects of habitat destruction and disturbance.

As the last of four articles in this series about *SARA,* first published in the *Wild Lands Advocate* over one year ago, this is an opportunity to revisit the species mentioned over the previous three articles and discuss what must change to make *SARA*'s next 25 years something to celebrate.

In late 2023, the spotted owl was making news as the British Columbia government continued to approve the logging of old-growth forest. This forest was identified as critical habitat for the spotted owl and vital to the survival of the last wild-born animal left in Canada. At the same time, Environment and Climate Change Minister Steven Guilbeault and the government were dragging their feet over a decision to issue a *SARA* emergency order which would later be denied by the Governor-in-Council (federal cabinet).

The Federal Court of Canada ruled in June 2024 that the delay in recommending an emergency order for the Spotted Owl violated the federal *Species at Risk Act*, which means that future emergency order recommendations will have to be done more quickly. The federal court was also scathing in its criticism of the federal government, and writing about Minister Guilbeault's delay, Justice Roy stated he found it "difficult to fathom how a period of more than eight months could be reasonable once the opinion has been formed that there exist imminent threats to the species' survival or recovery. Either the threats are imminent or not," he said.

"Either the threats concern the survival or recovery of the species or they do not. Once the opinion that the threats are about to happen, the *Act* says that the recommendation must be made. There is emergency."

These words from Justice Roy are applicable to almost every other listed species-at-risk, whether it be trout, caribou, greater sage-grouse, or western chorus frogs. All are victims of unreasonable government delays, causing their already critically low numbers to plummet further.

In Alberta, caribou, greater sage-grouse, and three species of at-risk trout may benefit from the spotted-owl decision if their populations reach equally dire levels. Commenting in *The Narwhal*, Ecojustice lawyer Kegan Pepper-Smith, who represented the Wilderness Committee in their legal challenge, said the decision was "precedent-

setting," and will require future ministers to "act with the urgency required of the legislation and recommend an emergency order to cabinet right away."

As discussed in previous articles, our courts have shown themselves to be the most consistent defenders of species-at-risk, interpreting the requirements of *SARA* to their intended effect and holding governments responsible for ignoring their own laws. This is largely thanks to the efforts of non-governmental organizations and the commitment of lawyers from organizations like Ecojustice, who work together to bring these challenges before the courts and wider public attention.

> **"NGOs and engaged members of the public have become just as important as our courts in protecting species at risk."**

Moving towards 2027 and beyond, legal battles will remain a key part of *SARA*'s success or failure. As Pepper-Smith noted, one decision can have effects that go beyond the single species involved, compelling governments to act differently for all species facing similar threats.

But legal victories are only one part of the puzzle because courts are limited in how strongly they can compel governments to follow through. Justice Roy was not asked to consider the validity of the Governor-in-Council decision to deny the emergency order, nor did the Justice decide to impose concrete limits on future timelines for government decision-making. The reluctance or inability to issue strong remedies ensures the problems will persist.

This leaves the rest of the battle to be fought through public pressure, advocacy, and access to high-quality information. For spotted owls, the scrutiny of court proceedings caused the government to reconsider the amount of critical habitat designated in the updated draft recovery strategy. The new plan reinstated 200,000 hectares of critical habitat that, as reported by *The Narwhal*, had been removed from the 2023 version of the draft recovery strategy following consultations with the British Columbia government.

For the western chorus frog, good news has come in the form of habitat protection led by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). The group announced a significant land purchase in December 2024 connecting Gatineau Park to the Ottawa River, a critical wildlife corridor needed to maintain their already low population. The Quebec government offered some support, but the victory was mostly thanks to the efforts of the NCC and its supporters. Commenting in the Ottawa Citizen, NCC project manager Francisco Retamal Diaz spoke strongly about the community's leadership role protecting the frog.

NGOs and engaged members of the public have become just as important as our courts in protecting species at risk and upholding *SARA*'s purpose throughout its first 25 years. Our governments have shown themselves to be vulnerable to pressure from industry and political priorities when it comes to balancing development and protection.

Adding to this is the trend of governments focusing power and information within increasingly small groups of deputy ministers, advisors, and cabinet ministers who operate closely with premiers and prime ministers, keeping tight control over the flow of information. At the same time, access to information processes have become almost impossible to navigate, with some information taking years to be delivered only to be redacted beyond usefulness. And that is if the information exists at all.

Lawyer Drew Yewchuk is very familiar with this situation from his time at the Public Interest Law Clinic in Calgary and now through his research at the University of British Columbia where he is a PhD student focusing on, among other things, information law, administrative secrecy, and species at risk.

He previously provided insight on the state of government compliance when it comes to following *SARA*'s timelines and disclosure requirements. When it was suggested that governments had fallen into a culture of complacency, Yewchuk went further, stating that "I don't think this phrasing is accurate. I call it executive non-compliance or executive branch resistance." To Yewchuk, successive governments have simply chosen to not fulfill tasks required of them by law and past court decisions.

He now sees a system where "cabinet confidentiality has grown out of control" and

Sage-grouse are an iconic Albertan species yet are endangered. Last spring, there were only 20 males counted.
**Photo © C. Olson**

Canadians are completely left out of the decision-making processes of their own governments. Worse, the justification for this secrecy ranges from "uncompelling to incoherent." Thankfully, lawyers like Yewchuk, along with journalists and advocates, are exposing these failures and the harm they cause to Canadians.

The success or failure of protecting species at risk in Canada ultimately comes down to cooperation between the provinces and the federal government and a willingness to treat the citizens they represent as equal partners in the sharing of information. The formula for this kind of cooperation and insight already exists in an agreement signed between the provinces and the federal government in 1996, six years before *SARA* became law.

The *Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk* (the *Accord*) was signed by all provinces and territories and the federal government following a series of public workshops for a national approach to protecting species at risk. As a result, each province and territory agreed to establish complementary legislation and programs for effective protection of species at risk throughout Canada. The specific contents listed as part of the prospective provincial legislation mirror much of the protections and mechanisms contained in *SARA*.

To date, almost every province and territory has either failed to pass this legislation into law or has underutilized their existing species-at-risk laws to the point that they are essentially useless. Since 2002, provinces have actively resisted taking responsibility for species at risk while the federal government has relied on delaying decisions to avoid jurisdictional conflict.

Since confederation, the Supreme Court has given our governments the tools and strong legal precedent to work together through cooperative federalism. This is especially important for species-at-risk, where the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments often collide. Unless the encroachment into someone else's jurisdiction is significant, courts have consistently told governments to get along and do their jobs. The *Accord* is a symbol of this message and a tool our leaders seem to have completely forgotten about, or worse, ignored.

Reversing the negative trends of *SARA*'s first 25 years depends on the provinces passing and utilizing laws they agreed to implement over 30 years ago in the Accord. The limitations of federal jurisdiction mean that *SARA* protects less than five percent of Canada's geography and its emergency provisions only prevent further destruction of critical habitat at the cost of the continuing conflict between the provinces and federal government.

At the same time, there must be political will to change the approach to access to information regimes and dismantle the tight grip governments across Canada have on knowledge that is not theirs to keep. Without these changes, we are doomed to repeat these 25 years all over again.

# 60 Years Defending

It 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.

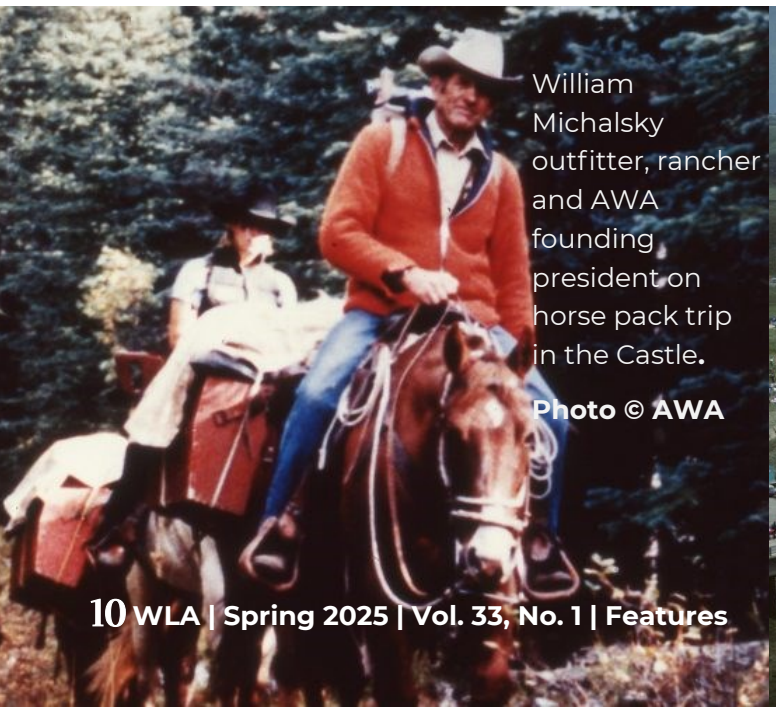
Relationships allow AWA to assume what may be ambitious projects requiring local support, partnership cooperation and a committed volunteer base for success.

### 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.

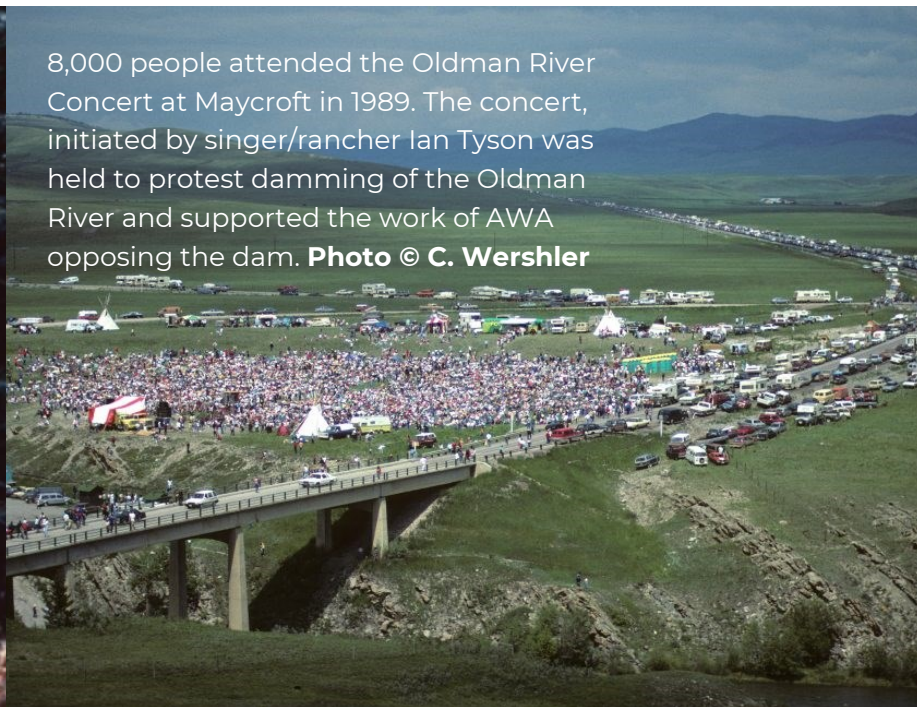
AWA found the means to hire a writer to consolidate people's collected ideas into two books to present at the formal Eastern Slopes hearings in 1973. The hearings were well attended, and their recommendations strongly favoured conservation of wildlife habitats, watersheds and aesthetic values. They led 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**

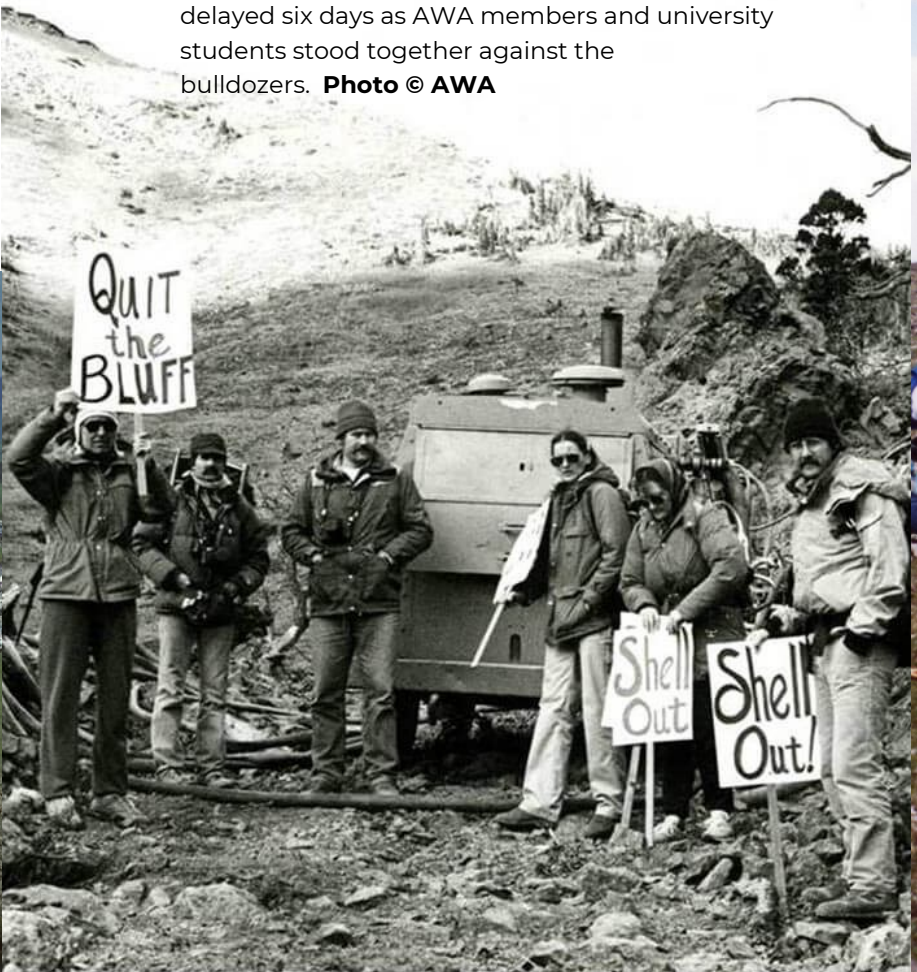


8,000 people attended the Oldman River Concert at Maycroft in 1989. The concert, initiated by singer/rancher Ian Tyson was held to protest damming of the Oldman River and supported the work of AWA opposing the dam. **Photo © C. Wershler**

# 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**

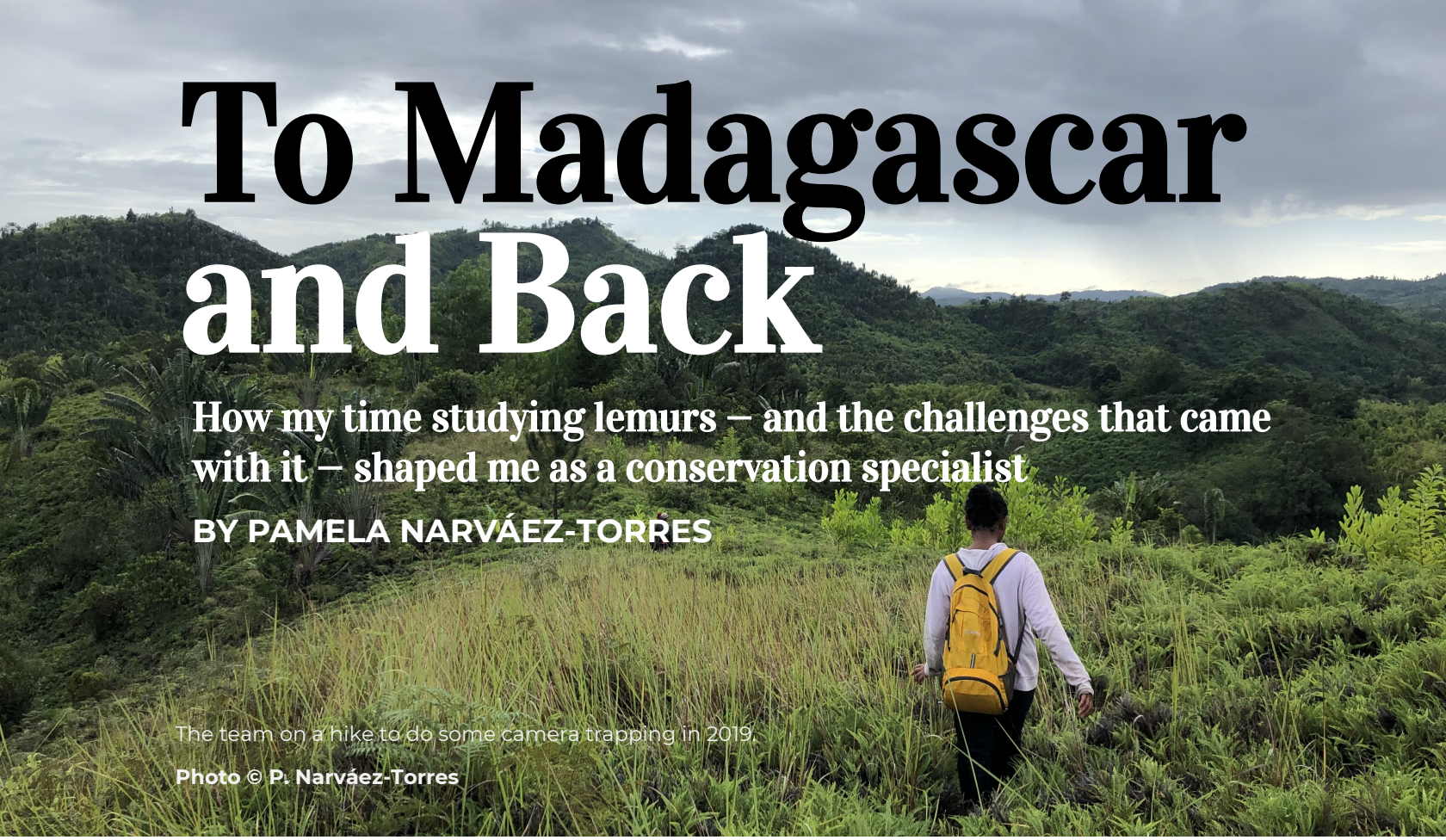



AWA worked with industry in the 1990's to gain protection for the Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve, to prevent further commercial development and open pit mining in Kananaskis Country and on the boundary of Jasper National Park. AWA remains a steward of Plateau Mountain to this day. **Photo © N. Douglas**

# To Madagascar and Back

## How my time studying lemurs — and the challenges that came with it — shaped me as a conservation specialist

**BY PAMELA NARVÁEZ-TORRES**



The team on a hike to do some camera trapping in 2019.

**Photo © P. Narváez-Torres**

It was during my second — and last time — being in Madagascar that I climbed through wind-torn jungle trees after a cyclone had hit just days before. As I carefully picked which branch to grab next, it dawned on me how much climate change will impact the future of many species-at-risk.

I haven't always been a conservation specialist.

Before setting my roots at Alberta Wilderness Association, I spent 10 years in and out of Madagascar as part of my master's and PhD work.

Since I began my research as a graduate student at the University of Calgary, I have focused on understanding how different types of disturbance, mainly caused by humans, impact lemur communities in southeast Madagascar. Through both my master's and now my PhD research, working in a highly disturbed ecosystem has shaped me as an ecologist, allowing me to analyze the complexities of ecosystems and the intricate ways species respond to environmental change.

### Setting the scene

My research is based in Madagascar, an island country in the Indian Ocean, off the east coast of Africa. It has about 30 million people, with over 80 percent living below the poverty line of $2.15 USD per person per day. Lemurs are the endemic primates of Madagascar, meaning that the over 110 species described so far originated on the island and are found nowhere else in the world. Sadly, at least 17 species have gone extinct in the last 1,000 years due to human activities, and the remaining species are among the most threatened mammals in the world.

It is estimated that the ancestor of most modern lemur species arrived on the island around 65 million years ago. At that time, the island had relatively few mammal species, allowing lemurs' ancestors to evolve into a wide variety of species in a process called adaptive radiation. This evolutionary path has produced extraordinary diversity: for example, the extinct *Archaeoindris fontoynontii* (there isn't even a common name for this species!) was roughly the size of a gorilla, weighing around 160 kilograms, while the tiniest living lemur, Madame Berthe's mouse lemur, weighs just 33 grams. Today, lemurs come in all shapes and sizes, from the child-sized indri to the tiny mouse lemurs. Some have evolved remarkable traits, like the aye-aye's ever-growing rodent-like teeth or the bamboo lemurs' ability to consume cyanide-containing bamboo daily without harm.

Madagascar is a global biodiversity hotspot, home to an incredible number of endemic plants and animals. Unfortunately, much of its forest cover has been lost, pushing many species toward extinction. Most of my research has taken place in the southeast of Madagascar, on the forest fragments near the Kianjavato commune. Over

the last 70 years, this area has lost around 90 percent of its original forest cover, and the forests that remain are home to nine species of lemurs, each with unique characteristics. Four species are nocturnal, four are cathemeral (active during both day and night), and one is diurnal. Among these species is one of the smallest lemurs, Jolly's mouse lemur, as well as the Greater bamboo lemur — one of the few animals capable of surviving on cyanide-rich bamboo.

### Trip one

In 2016, during my first trip to Madagascar for my master's research, I spent six months in the field collecting data on lemur abundance and diversity. My goal was to understand how human disturbances affect lemur presence and abundance: do areas with more disturbance have fewer individuals and fewer species? And conversely, do areas with less disturbance support more individuals and more species?

My research involved daily hikes through hilly forests to conduct lemur surveys. My team included four local technicians from Kianjavato and a Malagasy master's student. Together, we surveyed lemurs using 500-metre-long transects. These are straight paths through the forest created by researchers and technicians using a GPS unit and tape measures to systematically record wildlife observations. Over my six months, we repeatedly walked 35 transects across five forest fragments. Each day, we would travel to one of these fragments and walk two or three transects, scanning the treetops for lemurs. Since some species are nocturnal, we conducted surveys both during the day and at night.

At first glance, this might sound like a peaceful nature walk, but it was far from it! First, this is a tropical forest, so it was hot and humid. Second, the terrain was extremely hilly, making every survey a serious workout. Third, Kianjavato only has one road, and the villages have been built along it. Over time, deforestation has expanded outward from the road as people clear land for agriculture and other uses. As a result, most forest fragments are now far from the road, making access difficult. Surveying lemurs wasn't just about walking 500 metres on a transect; it also meant hiking up to 10 kilometres just to reach the site — climbing steep hills, crossing multiple creeks, and then doing it all again on the way back. And, of course, we had to repeat this day after day, for six months, often working both day and night! It was exhausting work, and we didn't always see lemurs on the surveys, but just being in the forest where they live, listening to the sounds of nature, and spotting other wildlife was something truly special.

Each survey lasted at least 30 minutes, longer if lemurs were detected. When we spotted a lemur, we recorded the species, group size, tree species, height in the canopy, and other relevant data. Once the day surveys were completed, we hiked back to the road to catch a ride to the field station. In six months of data collection, we observed eight of the nine species, only missing the elusive aye-aye.

In Kianjavato, I lived at the Kianjavato Ahmanson Field Station (KAFS), run by the Madagascar Biodiversity Partnership, a local NGO. In 2016, accommodation was basic — there was no running water or electricity, though solar panels allowed us to charge equipment. We slept in tents inside huts and shared a latrine. By 2019, a rainwater-operated toilet had been installed, and by 2022, multiple toilets were available throughout the field site.

With my master's research, I provided insights into lemur communities in disturbed forests, reinforcing my interest in conservation and the urgent need to study threatened species. Building on this foundation, my PhD research shifted to using camera traps instead of transects, allowing for a broader and less invasive method of monitoring wildlife. I also expanded

Pamela, left, and Mirana Jeynne Evah Rahariniaina after a hard day of work in the forest.

**Photo © C. Razafindravelo**


A welcome sign in Kianjavato.

**Photo © P. Narváez-Torres**

Camera trapping point before the cyclones.
**Photo © P. Narváez-Torres**

my study area to include Ranomafana National Park (RNP), a protected area about 70 kilometres west of Kianjavato, to compare lemur communities in degraded and intact forests.

### Trip two

In 2019, I spent four months in Madagascar testing a camera trap network with a master's student. Camera trapping has long been used in wildlife research, but most studies have focused on terrestrial species. However, the lemurs I study in Kianjavato spend most of their lives in the trees, making ground-based cameras ineffective for studying them. In recent years, researchers in tropical forests worldwide have adapted camera trap technology for use in the canopy, allowing for better monitoring of arboreal mammals and birds.

Our goal was to test whether camera traps placed high in the trees could effectively record the nine lemur species in the area. Our daily routine was similar to line transect work — wake up, eat breakfast, hike to our destination. However, camera trapping required much heavier backpacks filled with tree-climbing gear, cameras, batteries, and climbing ropes. Once we reached the desired location, we selected a tree, conducted a risk assessment, and set up the climbing rope. After climbing around eight metres, we installed a camera up on the tree, placed another at ground level, and conducted vegetation and disturbance surveys before moving to the next location.

By the end of the season, we were so happy with the results — our cameras had captured all nine lemur species, showing that arboreal camera trapping was more effective than line transects.

### A delayed return, and the cyclones

I planned to return to Madagascar in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic delayed my fieldwork until 2022. In January 2022, I traveled back with two other graduate students and a research assistant from the University of Calgary. After a 28 -hour journey to Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, we underwent COVID-19 testing and isolation before meeting our Malagasy research assistants and heading to Kianjavato.

Although this was my third trip to Madagascar, it was the first time I was there during the main part of the rainy season, so I anticipated some challenges. However, I was not expecting just how different this field season would be. My research assistant, Mirana, and I met our team of eight local technicians and began installing camera traps in January, just like I had done in 2019.

By early February, reports emerged of an approaching category 3 cyclone, Batsirai. After only nine days of work, we packed our tents and evacuated to Centre ValBio (CVB), a field station located in RNP.

At CVB, other graduate researchers had also gathered to wait out the storm. We closely monitored weather updates, hoping Batsirai would weaken or change course. Unfortunately, it made landfall with sustained winds of 165 kilometres per hour and gusts up to 230 kilometres per hour. We had to stay at CVB for five days until the roads were cleared of landslides and fallen trees.

We returned to KAFS, witnessing widespread devastation. Many community members lost their homes and given that typical houses in the area are made from wood with woven palm leaves for roofs, the destruction was severe. KAFS sustained mainly vegetation damage, but the forest fragments were unrecognizable. When we resumed work, navigating the landscape was far more challenging due to fallen trees and thick debris. Even though I considered myself an experienced hiker, I got heat exhaustion on my first day back in the forest after a pretty easy hike.

Camera trapping point after both cyclones.
**Photo © P. Narváez-Torres**

Kianjavato commune landscape in 2019.

**Photo © P. Narváez-Torres**

Tree climbing became even riskier — many trees that remained standing were unstable or had broken branches, so I had to carefully assess each tree before climbing. The team and I worked for a few more days, and I spent some days teaching them tree climbing before heading back to CVB for a tree-climbing workshop I was leading. Over five days, I trained local technicians on tree climbing techniques to install camera traps for a long-term research project in RNP. This project is also part of my PhD and will help us compare lemur responses to disturbances in protected versus unprotected areas.

Mirana and I then returned to KAFS, only to face yet another evacuation — this time due to Cyclone Emnati, a category 4 storm heading our way. We were evacuated again the next day, and Emnati made landfall on the day after. Fortunately, by the time it reached Madagascar, it had weakened to a category 1 cyclone. This time, we only had to stay at CVB for four days. The next day, we were back in the field, retrieving the cameras we had managed to set before the first cyclone struck. We also took the opportunity to assess cyclone-related disturbances in the vegetation, recording the number of fallen trees, broken trunks, and snapped branches across our survey plots.

Thankfully, the remainder of my time in Madagascar was uneventful — aside from multiple bouts of what felt like heat exhaustion. The team adapted quickly to the disruptions, and we successfully recovered all our cameras while conducting additional vegetation surveys.

Despite the challenges posed by the cyclones — including fallen trees that had cameras mounted on them — the cameras still managed to capture all nine lemur species that inhabit the Kianjavato forests. Our vegetation surveys revealed that at least 77 percent of the trees had suffered substantial damage, ranging from fallen leaves and broken branches to fully uprooted trees.

This experience deeply shaped me as a field ecologist. It gave me a firsthand look at the potential effects of climate change — not just on wildlife but also on the human communities that depend on these forests. Cyclones are not new to Madagascar, but climate change is expected to increase both their frequency and intensity, placing additional pressure on local communities that rely on forest resources, as well as on the already fragile ecosystems and the wildlife that depend on them.

My work in Madagascar over the past 10 years has taught me far more than the ecological interactions between animals and vegetation or how lemurs respond to disturbances. It has shaped me as both a scientist and a conservation advocate. The impacts of climate change, while varying across the globe, are inevitable. How we respond will determine the future of both people and wildlife.

Joining AWA is an exciting new chapter in my career. I am passionate about conservation and eager to bring my expertise to this incredible organization, which has been working to protect Alberta's wilderness for 60 years. I look forward to contributing to AWA's efforts to protect our province's wilderness and collaborating with colleagues, other ENGOs, and the broader community in this mission.

# Statements vs Facts

## Do government statements always align with evidence?

### BY RUIPING LUO

Alberta saw a lot of changes in the past year for wildlife management which has expanded hunting and trapping opportunities in the province. But was there any justification for the changes? Todd Loewen, Alberta Minister of Forestry and Parks, seems to say there is, but AWA's repeated requests for evidence have been largely ignored or dismissed.

Meanwhile, the evidence that *is* available mostly contradicts Loewen's statements, suggesting that these decisions are unsustainable and could have devastating consequences on wildlife. Here, we looked at some of the statements made by the government and compare them to actual evidence available on the topic.

This is part 1, as we examine a change affecting Alberta's threatened grizzly bears.

**The policy change:** The *Wildlife Act* was amended in Jun 2024 to allow "problem" animals to be hunted by licensed hunters, instead of leaving it to trained professionals to deal with. "Problem" animals are those involved in conflict or in an "area of concern," and included ***threatened grizzly bears.***

**What the government said:** Grizzly Bear numbers have increased from approximately 800 to more than 1,150 (Government of Alberta News: Protection of life and property from problem wildlife, June 2024).

**The evidence:**

In 2010, the Status of the Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*) in Alberta report estimated 691 individuals, of which 359 were mature and capable of reproducing. The province provided a broader estimate of 700 to 800 bears.

In 2021, Alberta announced a population of 865 to 973 bears, based on extensive surveys by fRI Research. Assuming exponential growth, a common model to describe recovering grizzly bear populations, that means an overall population growth rate of between 0.7 to 3.2 percent per year.

To reach 1,150 bears in 2024, the population growth would need to be between 5.7 and 10 percent per year, or about double the rate prior to 2021. While this growth rate is not impossible, it seems unlikely, especially as no data was provided to support the recent numbers.

Grizzly bears are listed as threatened in Alberta.
**Photo © C. Olson**

**What the government said:** Grizzly bear recovery has been successful. Alberta's Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan remains in place. (Todd Loewen, Minister response to AWA concerns on hunting "problem" grizzly bears, Nov. 2024).

**The evidence:** According to the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, grizzlies were listed as *Threatened* in Alberta partly because "the population was estimated to be less than 1,000 mature individuals." In grizzly populations, mature individuals generally make up roughly half of the population or less. One of the priorities listed in the recovery plan is "to resolve human-caused mortality," including killing problem bears and hunting. Rather than allowing the general public to hunt "problem" bears, we should be working towards coexistence and reducing any conflict and killing of bears. A population of 1,150 bears likely means a mature population of only 500 or 600 bears, far from the numbers needed for the population to be considered recovered.

**What the government said:** In 2020 there were three attacks; 2021 recorded a total of nine attacks by black and grizzly bears, contributing to a total of 104 attacks from 2000 to 2021 (Government of Alberta News: Protection of life and property from problem wildlife, June 2024).

**The evidence:** A thesis study of fatal bear attacks in Canada found eight fatal attacks by grizzly bears in Alberta between 1990 and 2023, and three by black bears. Parks Canada data indicates six attacks (fatal or non-fatal) by grizzly bears between 2010 and 2023, and four black bear attacks in Alberta. While these sources are not able to provide a complete record for bear attacks throughout Alberta, there is a huge gap between these records and the number provided in the news release.

**What the government said:** Over the last number of years, the annual average has been about 20 grizzlies killed per year from negative human interactions (attributed to Todd Loewen, reported by St. Alberta Gazette, July 2024).

**The evidence:** Grizzly bear mortality rates in Alberta consistently indicate 20 to 28 bears were killed as "problem" wildlife per decade, or an average of two to three bears per year, and around the same number are killed in self-defence. Interestingly, the recent 2013-2022 report, published after the changes that allow grizzly hunting, states that 57 bears were killed between 2013 and 2022 as a result of "agency removals," a category that appears to have replaced the "destroyed - problem bears" record. It does not distinguish why the bear was killed, whether it was by accident, or for being a "problem bear," for example. This new, broader category will make it more difficult to track how many problem bears are euthanized each year.

# Wilderness Art Features

**Neil Kathol, *Log Haul, 2024 oil on canvas.***

*Log Haul* is painted in a style intending to emulate the look of photographic images. That way it can incite alarm through meanings of photojournalism and photography-as-evidence. The deforestation of the Eastern Slopes, including next to seasonal or year-round creeks, continues to trade the quality and quantity of Alberta's water sources for mill jobs and below-average building materials.

Neil Kathol is an artist working on subjects ranging from the environment (especially the relentless attacks on the Eastern Slopes) to things happening around him in general, to abstract explorations, and to studies of phenomena and objects re-contextualized or presented in new ways; mainly to express ideas and generate new and impactful visual experiences. He is a founding director of the Livingstone Landowners Group and is one of the many people actively opposing the terrible idea of putting coal mines in our headwaters.

## Art Cards By Allie

I live and work in Airdrie. I have always loved drawing.

I started painting in 2020 and began my business in 2021.

I am a Special Olympic athlete and have been on Team Canada's golf team. I love to travel and have been to Germany, UK, USA, Mexico and Africa.

I love my cards, hope you do too!

Thank you for your support!

allieartcards@gmail.com

From left: Three Sisters; Merry Dancers; and Mountain Skies.


Part 1 of the hearings for Northback's proposed Grassy Mountain coal project was held by the AER in Pincher Creek, Alberta on Dec. 3, 2024.
**Photo** © K. Halvorson

# Twenty Minutes in front of the Alberta Energy Regulator

*"I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak to you today and appreciate the effort everyone has taken to be here. Despite differing perspectives, I want to recognize the importance of these public forums in which we can engage, as I know we are all largely motivated and advocating for what we think is best for the region and our communities."*

It's the afternoon of Dec. 3, 2024, and I am standing at a wooden podium in the community hall in Pincher Creek, Alberta. Thankfully, I face just three public hearing commissioners. A handful of Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) staff, coordinators, transcribers and the like, sit just off to my left, busying the peripherals of my vision. Behind me, the room is divided in two, literally and metaphorically. The rows of chairs on either side are almost packed full.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I had never participated in a public hearing before, and truthfully, not many people have. They are infrequent at the AER. Despite processing almost 35,000 applications last year, only 16 were determined to need a public hearing. Four actually took place, with hearing commissioners ultimately issuing just two decisions.

This hearing was broken into two parts to accommodate the numerous interested parties. Along with all the other limited participants, AWA was given the opportunity during the first two-day session to submit a written statement and provide a brief oral presentation.

Although the rest of the list seemed to be organized alphabetically, we've been slated as the last presentation of the day, and I'm worried the commissioners will be too tired to even feign interest by the time it's my turn on the stand. Hell, 20 presentations precede mine — I doubt if my own attention span will last through the hours that loom ahead.

I find myself a seat on the right, just a few rows from the front. Can't be too keen. Much of the crowd's familiar with each other; folks lean back over plastic chairs or congregate in the wings, conversing with neighbours, friends, family. Many heads don cowboy hats; a reflection of the region's deep ranching roots and rural bonds. When the front row fills with suits, it's in stark contrast to the rest of the crowd. Northback's advertisers have spent so much time painting them as part of the community, you'd think they'd have told their reps and lawyers to loosen their ties.

At 9:04 a.m. it begins.

All my worries about boredom and fatigue quickly fade; whether I agree with the speakers or not, everyone's words have been chosen purposefully, and all have come impassioned. My rapt attention comes easily.

The first speaker, a recently retired doctor from the Pass, starts off strong and comedic, holding up a green bill.

"I looked at the net worth of the individual who is the ultimate owner of this company … The 20 bucks I'm about to put on the table is more than equal on a net-worth basis to what they have pledged."

Calling into question the sincerity of recent community investments, Dr. Allan Garbutt points out that these injections of cash are but a drop in the bucket to Gina Reinhardt, the richest person in Australia and owner of Northback's parent company, Hancock Prospecting.

These types of donations are so common that a whole body of research exists to explore what influences industry to do so. Some of the most frequent motivations include repairing reputations, establishing political or social favour, improving public perception, reducing regulatory barriers, and obstructing environmental misconduct.

Others insist that's not Northback's agenda.

"They're not trying to buy our support; they're trying to be part of the community," says Troy Linderman, a member of the Citizens Supportive of Crowsnest Coal. He believes a future mine will

provide “mortgage-paying jobs, infrastructure, and support for our industries and services like seniors’ living and tourism”. Among those here in support, these are common themes; proponents emphasize the economic benefits they believe a coal mine would bring.

When some speak to money and jobs they’ve already seen, it quickly becomes evident that many here advocating on behalf of Northback have future contracts with or are already employed by the company. This includes Don Forsyth of Tig Contracting, who expresses frustration with the process; “Our drill program to gather more data is being hijacked by a no-coal movement.”

This is one of a few seemingly innocuous, pro-Northback, arguments that arise so frequently during the hearing, you’d think it was scripted. Not the hijacking bit (I think we’re better characterized as a movement that is pro-mountains or drinks water), but the assertion that the drill program is required to collect data to better inform any future efforts on Grassy.

Other oft-uttered refrains include:

- Technologies used today are far superior to historical practices.
- Alberta’s world-class environmental standards and regulations will prevent any harm.
- Northback deserves a fair chance to proceed and prove themselves.
- Northback will reclaim legacy disturbance on Grassy Mountain if their project is approved.

These are easily refuted, take the last argument for example. Currently, coal companies undertaking exploration projects don't have to put down any money upfront to ensure they've got the funds to reclaim disturbance caused by their activities. That means reclamation is poorly enforced since it can be difficult to hold companies accountable. It’s also unclear who is responsible for legacy liabilities. Northback (NB) confirms exactly this when cross-examined by the Livingstone Landowners Group (LLG) at the full participants hearing on January 14, 2025:

**NB:** We're unable to comment [as] to what the liability [is] and how that sits with the historical mining on that land. I don't know how the liability of the reclamation from the historical mines sits with the entities as it currently stands.

**LLG:** You're the chief operating officer of Northback, and you don't know whether Northback assumed the reclamation liability for the legacy operations on the site?

**NB:** … We do not have a reclamation bond for this particular site.”

AWA staff members Phillip Meintzer, left, and Kennedy Halvorson hold up signs at a demonstration outside the AER on Jan. 14, 2025. **Photo © A. Tucker**

As the day progresses, I’m astounded at the number of speakers who trust Northback, simply because.

“I have full confidence that Northback will prove to you that they can manage it. I listen to them talk, and I believe they can.”

This one comes from a current employee of Imperial Oil. He notes that his employer undertakes similar operations that must follow the “strict guidelines set forth” by the AER “to ensure water quality” and “environmental protection.” He’s “sure this mine would be held to the same standard.”

Surely, this isn’t the same Imperial Oil whose leaking tailings ponds went unreported for months, who released millions of litres of industrial wastewater into the environment? That’s the standard the AER is holding Northback to? With friends like these, I wonder if Northback needs enemies.

Other arguments make my stomach turn. The president of the Coal Association of Canada urges the AER to consider the growing need for metallurgical coal, particularly “to produce ammunition and weapons” made of steel in ongoing and future wars. Plenty of other uses for steel exist that might’ve been highlighted first before settling on horrific tools that sow mass destruction and death. Robin Campbell must’ve never needed to consider the ramifications of war too seriously during his stint in politics.

“I'd like to thank our previous environment minister for his ringing endorsement of the coal mines.”

Quick-witted and wily, Corb Lund gets a good jab in and breaks up the string of pro-coal

speakers all at once. It's also a relief to finally hear from some allies. Corb's a natural connector, and his presentation reflects all the work he's done listening and engaging on this issue.

He takes time to elevate the messages of two First Nation community groups who worry that their leadership is not representing the will of the people. The Mountain Child Valley Society asked Corb to state that they support economic development, but not "at the expense of our environment and our water." From the Kainai Sundance Society, he relays a terse message:

"Foreign coal companies, you're not welcome in Blackfoot country."

Corb cedes the rest of his time to Lee Eddy, a cow-calf operator who speaks on the issue of selenium bioaccumulation, and case studies in the states where contaminated water produced alfalfa too toxic to feed the cattle.

Brenda Davison of the Crowsnest Conservation Society's up next, and she's come with incredible maps illustrating exactly what we mean when we talk about cumulative impacts. Portable projector screens are staggered every few rows, and they soon fill with aerial imagery of the Rockies. From the Kakwa Wildlands down to Waterton, Brenda's highlighted a contiguous series of conserved areas safeguarded from development, with one glaring exception.

"The only place without protection is Livingstone … headwaters and wildlife habitat have been protected for almost 1,000 kilometres, except here."

We zoom down into the map to bring the Oldman headwaters into focus. Residential developments border the south. Huge chunks of forest are missing, clearcuts rampant in the Range. Further out east, cropland and irrigation infrastructure form a patchwork quilt, a splendor of yellow hues responsible for the region's immense water demand. Haul roads, seismic lines, recreation trails, pipelines, and other linear features crisscross the landscape. The pressures of the current human footprint are made evident for all in attendance, and they are significant, even without the added effects of coal.

The left side of the room has taken to clapping and cheering following these presentations. I've inadvertently sat in hostile territory, so I clap politely and ignore any sidelong glances. Despite Northback apparently having the ability to get "20 people here in the next hour who will gladly speak in support of the project," the majority of impassioned spectators present are decidedly anti-coal.

Chris Spearmen, the former mayor of Lethbridge, notes that they too were once a coal town, highlighting their transition to "a regional hub for agriculture and agricultural processing." He warns of the expected ill effects on Alberta's agri-food industry downstream, should a coal mine be restarted on Grassy. David McIntyre speaks with familiarity, fervour, and knowledge only derived from a lifetime on the landscape. He offers a new vision for the Pass.

"Crowsnest Pass is blessed with the essential ingredients that would enable it to benefit from this brand of internationally lucrative tourism, but only if the land's raw and compelling wealth of esthetic and ecological integrity are retained."

As the clock inches closer to my turn, I can't help but run through my notes a few more times. I tune out everything else and concentrate on what I've prepared. Being last is certainly good for one thing; no one's presented anything today that I haven't planned to cover, and it's clear I took a different approach. I'd sought out peer-reviewed research and data to supply relevant context. I'd emphasized the AER's legislated responsibility to the public and environment and critiqued their current processes. Focussing solely on the applications, I'd dug deep into all the relevant policies and regulations I could find and looked for any discrepancies between Northback's submissions, and what they're required to complete by law.

It's tedious, mind-numbing stuff truly. But I've come to realize — and maybe this was always just naivety on my part — that the government doesn't really care if wildlife dies, or habitats are destroyed, or rivers are polluted, or emissions rise. They care that you followed their rules to do it.

Guitar strings and a song snap me out into the moment.

"It's back, it's back, the zombie mine. Risen from the dead, how can it go ahead? What must we do to kill it one last time?

It's brave, it's out of the ordinary, it's Monica Field, a long-time resident and defender of the region. It's a little honest levity I needed. And now it's my turn.

"Hello — whoa."

Too much feedback. Deep breaths. Lorne Fitch's told me it's only nerve-wracking the first 500 times.

"Hello, everyone. My name is Kennedy Halvorson, and I am a conservation specialist with the Alberta Wilderness Association."

A transcript of the full speech can be read at albertawilderness.ca.

–Kennedy Halvorson

# AWA's Annual 2024 Martha Kostuch Annual Lecture and Wilderness Defender Award

## Congrats to Clint Docken!

Alberta Wilderness Association recognized Clint Docken, a long-time Alberta Wilderness Association board director with the Wilderness Defender Award last November. Clint has been practicing law in Calgary for over 50 years and has been involved in many significant environmental law cases.

As part of this award, AWA invited Clint to deliver the annual lecture that evening. The audience heard his "Stories From The Trenches" which consisted of his successful conservation campaigns over the years. With his great sense of humour, the stories were both interesting and entertaining.

As Clint's younger sister, I am able to report on our childhood which started in Saskatchewan where our parents were born but took us across Canada following our dad's career as an engineer. Living in Toronto, our parents were avid outdoor enthusiasts and there was no shortage of summer adventures and road trips exploring Ontario: we camped, hiked, swam and skated. Our large extended family of grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles were farmers in Liberty, Saskatchewan, so summers were spent on the farm. We were always outside. Sunrise to sunset.

When we moved back to Saskatchewan, Clint finished high school in Moose Jaw and was accepted into law at the University of Saskatchewan. While he was at university we were transferred to Edmonton and a whole new adventure started. There were mountains!

Clint finished his degree and landed an articling job in Calgary. Not wanting the city life and because he adored the new scenery, he moved to Bragg Creek and has lived there now since 1974. He found the perfect balance between practicing law in the city and coming home each day to 20 acres of paradise. He and his wife Julie raised their two kids there and now have their first granddaughter who will learn to love the wilderness.

With his passion for getting involved and encouraging people to fight for what they believe is right for the environment, he will continue to be an important influence in the province.

- Gail Docken, AWA Board President

Clint Docken with his grand-daughter. **Photo Submitted**

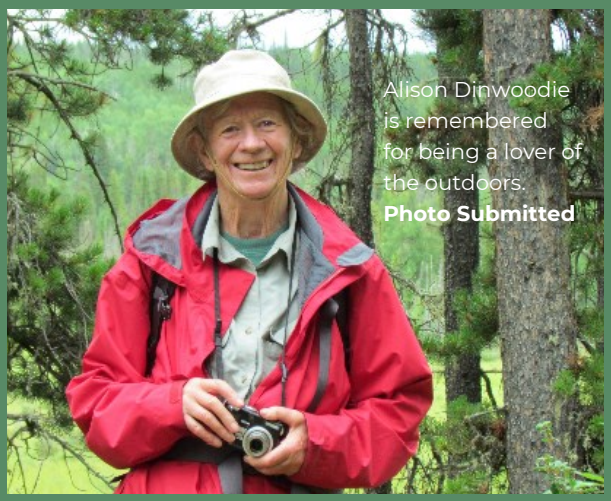
Clint Docken during a mountain climbing adventure. **Photo Submitted**

## In memoriam

# Remembering Alison Dinwoodie

*"A passionate outdoorswoman who turned her love of the outdoors and the natural environment into a volunteer career of advocacy for the conservation of Alberta's natural places."*

*-Elisabeth Beaubien, a long-time friend of Alison's*



Alison Dinwoodie is remembered for being a lover of the outdoors. **Photo Submitted**

Alison's enjoyment of mountaineering and sea kayaking were already well established when, armed with a PhD in biochemistry, she came to Edmonton in 1972 to do biomedical research in the Department of Laboratory Medicine at the University of Alberta. She quickly found the rivers and mountains of Alberta, B.C., and the Northwest Territories an effective replacement for the highlands and seascapes of her native United Kingdom, and this no doubt influenced her decision to make her permanent home in Edmonton.

She joined the Northwest Voyageurs Canoe and Kayak Club (NWV) and the Edmonton Section of the Alpine Club of Canada, quickly assuming leadership roles on their executive boards and gaining a reputation for her navigational skills and confidence in guiding outdoors, and her understanding and pursuit of issues.

Alison was particularly interested in the effect of recreation on wild spaces. Trail abuse by ATVers was her particular bête noire, but she was also concerned about the effects of the passive forms of recreation she participated in. As Frank Geddes, president of the NWV noted: "she did not see our access as the priority, but rather as subsidiary to environmental values." Sometimes, this made her unpopular with club members, as when she supported closure of the upper Maligne River to paddlers to safeguard harlequin ducks' breeding, and winter closure of the Tonquin Valley to protect mountain caribou.

There is little doubt that the Cardinal Divide area was Alison's favourite Rocky Mountain haunt. In 1994 she became a co-steward of newly designated Cardinal Divide Natural Area, representing the Edmonton Section of the Environmental Committee of the Alpine Club, along with Elisabeth Beaubien (and later Kristen Andersen) of the Alberta Native Plant Council.

Her skills in map interpretation (she delighted in correcting government maps!), her intimate knowledge of the area, and her capacity for attention to detail really aligned when she served as an intervenor in the federal-provincial environmental impact hearings into the opening of the Cheviot Mine open pit. The mine went ahead in 1997, but the environmental groups involved in these hearings won important protective concessions regarding the way the mine operated.

Alison was also instrumental in the creation of the Whitehorse Wildland Park in 1998, which includes the Cardinal Divide Natural Area, and in developing its management plan.

Alison remained involved when the mine was closing down and reclamation plans were under way. Fortunately, her legacy of conservation work in Whitehorse Wildland Park is being carried on by the Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition of environmental groups, which includes the AWA.

Spending so much time in the mountains, it was natural for Alison to become familiar with their spectacular alpine flora, an appreciation she wanted to share with others. With the help of local botanists, her idea of a guidebook came to fruition with the publication of *Wildflowers of Whitehorse Wildland* in 2020.

Alison extended her conservation interests to all landscapes, however. As a steward in the Alberta government's Volunteer Steward Program begun in 1987, Alison was front and centre in establishing the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association ca. 1999. This arms-length non-profit was designed to educate and support stewards in their dealings with government's multi-use policies. She served on its board for over 16 years and during this time took part in many interventions with the government regarding management and policy issues in Alberta's Protected Areas system.

In today's conservation climate, it can be difficult to assess the permanent legacy of advocacy. It is important to recognize, however, that people like Alison, with authentic grassroots knowledge, and the passion and stamina to apply it, keep the government accountable and aware that Albertans are prepared to defend the landscapes they love.

-Patsy Cotterill

## In memoriam

# Remembering Kris Unger

AWA Wild Adventurers who hiked in the Ghost with me during the past few years will probably remember our son Kris, the patient and gentle “sweep” who made sure nobody was left behind. He may have given some words of encouragement for tired stragglers but he usually preferred silence and watched out for wildlife, especially the “Ghost Ravens.” He loved the Ghost Valley, but it hurt him to see the devastation by massive clearcuts and the damage done by out-of-bound OHV riders.

After a beautiful family week spent on the west coast near Tofino, Kris left life quietly and peacefully late last year. While still recovering from a major Bipolar 1 episode, he was overwhelmed by hopelessness over the state of the environment, the ongoing brutal wars and conflicts, and more recently, the worsening political situation in the U.S. (he grew up and lived some 30 years in the Washington area). His love of nature had no limits, but Weltschmerz overcame him.

He was modest, gentle and kind, and loved children and cats; he had high moral standards. For many years he tended a beautiful vegetable garden and also helped a beekeeper friend with his hives. While in the Washington area, Kris worked tirelessly as volunteer leader on watershed protection, community action and environmental education in schools. He had great knowledge of vernal pools (look it up, although there aren’t any in Alberta) and loved exploring them. In 2010 his leadership was recognized, and he was named the "Potomac Riverkeeper of the Year" because he started and managed two suburban watershed groups, and exposed polluting contractors. For many years he organized and led weekly nature outings for inner-city children from SE-Washington, sponsored by the Sierra Club.

Kris traveled widely and, born in Malaysia, he had lived in five countries before he was ten. He climbed in the Austrian Alps, the Canadian Rockies, the Himalayas in Bhutan, and the Andes in Ecuador. He pioneered the sunrise hike on Black Rock Mountain, explored coulees in the South Saskatchewan and the Milk River, and took me up on the Sweetgrass Hills to look north into Alberta. Kris paddled the Ghost, the Bow, the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan Rivers. He had also canoed down the Potomac River from its source all the way to the open ocean. He trekked in the Amazon jungle and through a remote volcanic island in Vanuatu. And one early spring day in Falls Church, VA, he pulled three boys out of a pond after they had broken through the ice - and once they were safely with their parents, he just walked home in his wet and cold clothes.

I have lost a son and Nature lost a great friend. May he roam with the deer and soar with the ravens.

PS: His Austrian nephews remember how on a hike through a dense forest wetland he kept reassuring the boys saying "Es gibt einen Weg" (There is a way) – a great motto for Wild Adventures.

At the bottom of Kris’ emails was a reminder:

*“Nothing lasts*
*Nothing is finished*
*Nothing is perfect”*

-Heinz Unger


Kris Unger, left ,with his father, Heinz Unger.
**Photo © H. Unger**

Personal Essay

# No Dam Way

## BY LINDSEY WALLIS

In March 2024, a severe drought caused the Oldman Reservoir to dry up and the river to become a muddy creek. Neighbouring communities had to dredge the river bottom to pump water. Scientists raised concerns about sedimentation in the reservoir before the dam was constructed.
**Photo © L. Wallis**

It was my favourite shirt. Mostly because I was seven years old, and it had an almost-cussword on it. The shirt was white with a red octagon and inside, written in all caps, was NO DAM WAY. I got it from my dad, Cliff Wallis, who was heavily involved in the campaign and subsequent court cases against the construction of the Three Rivers Dam, or as it's now known, the Oldman Dam. Cliff is also a long-time board director for Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA).

At the time I didn't understand the significance this dam would have on the future of southern Alberta or the implications the court case would have for water and conservation across the country. I just remember the proliferation of NO DAM WAY merchandise in our house, TV cameras appearing on occasion in the front yard for interviews, and Dad disappearing downstairs with Milton Born With A Tooth and other organizers from Friends of the Oldman River to plan their next steps. This was truly a moment in Alberta conservation history when people came together: the Lone fighters of the Piikani Nation, conservation organizations like AWA, rural landowners, and individual Albertans came together under the banner of Friends of the Oldman River, united for a common cause.

My dad still tells the story of how they organized the benefit concert. Surprisingly, it was easy to get a permit to hold the outdoor concert near Maycroft, the perfect place, where the Oldman River flows out of the mountains, and the ridges of the Whaleback swell to the north. Celebrities including David Suzuki, Ian and Sylvia Tyson, Gordon Lightfoot, and others signed up to support the cause. Something like 10,000 people braved miles of muddy gravel roads to come and stand against the dam. There were traffic jams for miles down Highway 22. On the day of the concert, it was raining everywhere — the Eastern Slopes, and in the Porcupine Hills. But at the concert site, they were blessed with blue skies and sunshine.

Now, some naysayers said people were just coming to see famous people play a concert, but it was much more than that. The biggest cheers were for environmentalist David Suzuki, and when the time came to clean up, there was no garbage left by concertgoers. The volunteer cleanup crew only found some loose change on the ground. These were people who cared about the environment.

Speaking of loose change, during the concert, volunteers roamed the crowd with ice cream buckets, collecting money for the cause. The organizers were just hoping to break even. But that night, as they loaded the rented porta-potties onto a flatbed, they also jammed garbage bags full of cash into the back of my dad's tiny Suzuki jeep. As he tells it, he arrived home around 6 a.m. and spread the money out on our kitchen floor to organize it. After expenses, Friends of the Oldman had raised more than $20,000 from people's pocket change to support the fight. It was a fine example of folks from all stripes standing together and showing concern for the environment. "You go through these periods in Alberta's history where people come together and things get done," says Cliff.

"The government was really mad at us," he adds, laughing. And that wasn't the end. Friends of the Oldman River took the case to the Supreme

Court of Canada and won (meaning the federal government would have to conduct an Environmental Assessment and Review Process). Unfortunately, it was too late for the Oldman and the two other rivers affected by the dam. Unable to get an injunction, construction of the dam continued while the case wound its way through the courts.

It all came full circle last year when I organized an Adventure for Wilderness to the Oldman Dam and reservoir. In March of 2024, the communities of Cowley and Pincher Creek had to truck in water or dredge the river bottom to pump a trickle of water for their communities. It was what the scientists said would happen before the dam was constructed. The dam slows the river, which drops sediment behind the dam, filling the reservoir with silt. Last March we saw a trickle of muddy sludge, winding its way through a deep channel in kilometres of cracked silt.

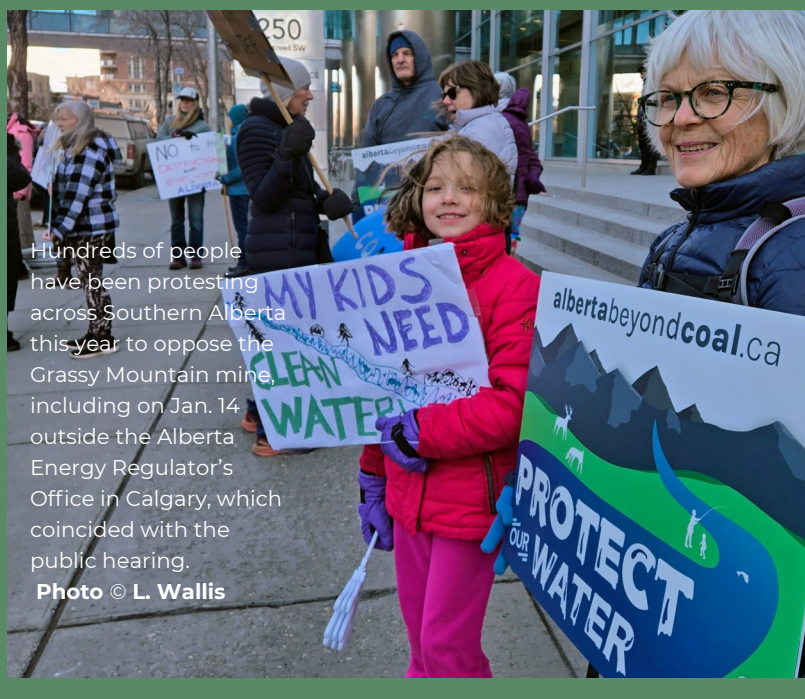
The dam protest was one of those special moments in AWA's 60-year history where everyone pulled in one direction for the same cause. Everyone's reasons varied, but they all spoke to connections with the land we love. There are other examples in our past where collaboration successfully moved conservation forward, creating protected areas such as the Willmore or Bob Creek. But with the Oldman Dam, things feel a little murkier. Did we win? In a very real way, no. The dam was almost built by the time the case wound its way through the courts. But there were wins. And lessons to learn.

According to Cliff, the biggest of these lessons is "don't give up." Before the Oldman Dam case, there was the Rafferty-Alameda Dam case in Saskatchewan. The opponents didn't exhaust all their legal options, and the dam was built, despite rulings of the lower courts. Cliff wonders, if they persevered and pushed the case to the Supreme Court, would the Oldman Dam ever have been constructed? As it stands, no major Alberta river has been dammed since Friends of the Oldman won their case in the Supreme Court of Canada. And the recommendations that came out of that court case (though the government ignored the first one, which was to decommission the dam) did help mitigate some of the damage. We study in-stream flow needs and river health because of those recommendations. It also changed environmental assessment law in Canada forever. The court ruled that assessments were mandatory, a ruling that heavily influenced the *Canadian Environment Assessment Act*.

Maybe 2025 will be another watershed moment for the conservation movement in Alberta, when Albertans of all stripes pull together and create meaningful change. There are certainly plenty of reasons to be outraged of late. Our water and wild spaces are again at risk. The provincial government appears to have learned nothing from the Oldman Dam, as they are proposing more dams to "mitigate drought." The Ardley Dam on the Red Deer River is currently under a feasibility study and a number of other reservoirs are in the pipeline. This is at a time when other jurisdictions are recognizing the harms of dams and removing them. Economic analysis shows these irrigation projects don't return on their investment.

The most recent issue that has galvanized Albertans is opposition to coal mining on the Eastern Slopes, and specifically Grassy Mountain. It looks like we have the community to make big things happen again. Opposition to the Grassy Mountain mine has and continues to bring folks together from ranching communities, Indigenous Nations, recreationists and conservationists.

As we continue our work to conserve our wild places, remember: We do what we can. Take our wins as we find them and always remember what we are fighting for. Because, as my dad said to me the other day, "Fifty years ago there were systems in place to advise government and [the Alberta government] have dismantled them. The only ones that are going to look after your environment are [everyday] people." And keep passing down that fire. Because as long as there are wild places, there will be those who love them and are willing to fight for them.




Hundreds of people have been protesting across Southern Alberta this year to oppose the Grassy Mountain mine, including on Jan. 14 outside the Alberta Energy Regulator's Office in Calgary, which coincided with the public hearing.
**Photo © L. Wallis**

# A note from the Executive Director

## Spring Thanks

I wanted to share a roundup of 2024 as we enter our 60th anniversary. So many people have been involved with AWA over the years — board members, volunteers, supporters, funders, participants and staff that have together created this amazing organization.

I can honestly say that I'm super proud of the work that we do. While we don't always see a positive result, I know that the Government of Alberta and industry people take notice when we speak. Our voices have continued to get louder over the years with every new member and every new fight.

This past year, AWA advocated on several environmental fronts and as always, we worked to spread awareness of these issues with many Albertans. We gave 10 presentations, hosted 11 talks/events, attended 11 tabling events, held four book club meetings and provided 31 (A4W) adventures. We collaborated with numerous other environmental non-profits, and we worked with several youth groups and academic institutions including the University of Calgary, SAIT, Calgary Arts Academy, Edelweiss Prep School, and Rocky View School. AWA shared our work through our biweekly newsletter, four issues of the Wild Lands Advocate, and of course across the spectrum of social media platforms.

In addition to the financial generosity of our members and funders, much of our work is supported by our incredible volunteers. We had more than 105 volunteers work with us in the past year and conservatively recorded over 1,230 hours of their assistance.

We couldn't do this work without all of you.

Please check out our latest annual report, posted on our website, for a more in-depth discussion of the past year's work. Thank you for being an AWA supporter. I look forward to seeing you in 2025!

*-Debborah Donnelly*

# Outdoors

## A Year of Adventures for Wilderness

The sun was warm, and the wind ruffled our hair as two dozen of us stood on the edge of the coulee overlooking the Rosebud River, about an hour north of Calgary, Alberta. It was early July, and everyone was here on an Adventure for Wilderness to understand just what made this place so special. A prairie falcon perched on an outcrop below us and, as we began to make our way into the coulee, a bull moose was flushed from a stand of aspen and disappeared over the coulee rim.

Our group had just come from a couple of kilometres upstream, where bank swallows darted in and out of their homes on a steep riverbank. Just a few hundred metres from that spot, a racetrack may soon disturb the idyllic surroundings — but not if the folks at Save the Rosebud have anything to say about it. We heard from biologists inventorying species in the area and learned about how, thanks to bat monitoring, an important wintering area was discovered. The adventurers were graciously hosted by neighbouring landowners, who work to keep habitat in this valley intact and fiercely oppose the racetrack. It is one thing to read about an issue in the news, but quite a different one to stand on the ground, smell the warmed earth, and see with your own eyes the beauty of a place. Speaking to people after this adventure, it had a profound effect on them. Walking the land connected them to this place more than words on a page ever could.

And that's just what the Adventures for Wilderness program aims to do — connect people to Wild Alberta in meaningful ways. Sometimes it is just getting out on the land to smell the heady scent of subalpine fir and feel the mountain breeze in our hair. Things that fill the soul and give us the strength to continue to fight for them. Sometimes our volunteer experts show us new ways to look at places and understand more about the creatures and plants that call them home. And sometimes, like in Rosebud, we learn about threats that face these special places and what we, as individuals, can do to help.

Last year, our Adventures program was

Hikers enjoy rambling the Whaleback ridges on last year's spring adventure. **Photo © L. Wallis**

spectacular; we connected over 400 participants with Wild Alberta. We explored dunes near Wainwright, rambled along ridges on the Eastern Slopes, and revelled in the riot of wildflowers blanketing the Milk River Ridge. We learned about pollinators and birds, beavers and geology. Some places we visited, like the Rosebud, are under threat. Artist Carolyn Fisher and AWA conservation specialist Devon Earl took folks for a day of art and education in the upper Highwood which, thanks to thousands of folks pushing back against industry, has a brief reprieve from the logging that was planned for the past two winters.

We also journeyed to places where degradation and destruction have already run rampant. More than 50 folks showed up in mid-March to the Oldman Reservoir. They heard stories of communities having to dredge and pump the river bottom or truck water in because of severe drought conditions and wanted to learn more. It was like a punch to the gut to see hundreds of metres of mud stretching along the valley bottom of what used to be a clear, vibrant river, home to many native trout. We only witnessed a dirty trickle of water wending its way through a deeply eroded channel in the parched, cracked reservoir. Despite this, we learned about its history, and drew strength from the fight against the dam. Local biologists shared their knowledge about what must happen in the future to support healthy rivers for people and wildlife.

It is such a pleasure to share the fantastic work that other individuals and organizations are doing to protect Wild Alberta. AWA partners with numerous organizations to help amplify their messages, and our adventures were led by almost two dozen knowledgeable volunteer coordinators. We learned about beaver coexistence projects, how conservation easements protect private land, and how volunteers are working to save native fish from irrigation canals.

This year's adventure calendar is filling up — join us on an Adventure for Wilderness, or help us celebrate AWA's 60th anniversary by answering the question, "What's your 60?" and create your own nature-based challenge around the number 60. It can be done anywhere in the province and can be whatever speaks most to YOU. The only limit is your imagination! On top of connecting with nature however you can, it's also a concrete way you can support conservation.

Learn more about joining the challenge on our website, where you can also sponsor other participants who have committed to goals like 60 nature walks, writing 60 nature haikus, or taking 60 photos of flowers. There are also people hiking, biking or skiing 60 trails, visiting 60 parks, writing 60 letters to government officials or planting 60 native plants on their properties. We can't wait to find out what's YOUR 60?

-Lindsey Wallis

Kirby England ferries adventurers across part of a beaver pond as they learned first-hand the importance of this misunderstood rodent to our watersheds. **Photo © L. Wallis**

# What's Your 60?

Join Alberta Wilderness Association as we celebrate our 60th anniversary by connecting with Wild Alberta.

Step 1: Choose a nature challenge you love.

Step 2: Complete your challenge during 2025 while supporting conservation in Alberta.

Step 3: Earn prizes as you complete your challenge!

Thanks to our prize sponsor:

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