

The United Nations has declared 2010, International Year of Biodiversity. Defined as “variety of life of earth”, biodiversity “...is essential to sustaining the living networks and systems that provide us all with health, wealth, food, fuel and the vital services our lives depend on.” (<http://www.cbd.int/2010welcome/#2>). What is missing from this list of vital services is water. The Castle Crown ecosystem is a water tower, supporting a boundless diversity of flora and fauna. For over two decades, the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition has strived to protect and restore this precious wilderness and invites Coalition members and the public to celebrate International Year of Biodiversity by participating on Saturday, July 31, 2010 in the following two hikes:

Middle Kootenay Pass, in the Castle region headwaters, is rated a moderately difficult hike, with a distance of 8 kilometres, duration of 3 to 4 hours, and elevation gain of 500 metres. Believed to have been frequented by the Kootenay Indians, (possibly on account of the abundance of huckleberries, which ripen on the slopes in late August), the loop traverses the continental divide and, at its highest point, presents breathtaking 360 degree views of Syncline Mountain, the Livingstone Range, Barnaby Ridge and Rainy Ridge. The summit plateau is lush with rhododendrons, beargrass, glacier lilies and other alpine flowers. An extended ascent up Rainy Ridge presents views of the headwaters of Middle Pass Creek and several sub-alpine lakes.

Led by biologist Reg Ernst, this hike promises to provide an overview of alpine ecology, observation and discussion of the impacts of OHV use in the alpine, a look at blister rust on whitebark pine, and identification of alpine and riparian wildflowers.

Castle Falls, near Beaver Mines, is an easy to moderate hike, with a distance of 8 km., duration of 4 to 5 hours and a slight elevation gain of 800 feet. Traversing picturesque foothills

country, the trail meanders along old logging roads and through open slopes, rambling over low hills for a view of the Carbondale and Castle rivers, before dropping down to a pond near the river, returning by a different route. Lead by Dave Sheppard, this hike would be of particular interest to conservationists opposed to the logging of coniferous forests, slated to occur in the region later this year.

Meeting place: Beaver Mines Store

Time: 9:00 am.

Registration is requested by calling Barbara at (403) 564-5158 or the Castle-Crown Coalition Office at (403) 627-5059.