

EUB HEARING IN PINCHER CREEK SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2007
CASTLE CROWN WILDERNESS COALITION
WENDY RYAN

Hello I am Wendy Ryan; I am the Outreach and Stewardship coordinator for the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition.

Throughout the spring and summer I have been fortunate to travel through the Castle Wilderness to observe and do hands on restoration work.

1. WEEDS in the Castle vary greatly from drainage to drainage due to the activity in the area, which include cattle, recreation and Shell.

In the community of Pincher Creek ranchers, farmers and interested citizens have joined in a formalized Blue Weed Pull once a year over the last 7 years. The Pincher creek canyon in the Front Range and down stream has been the focus area for the last 6 years. The group has worked very hard and pulled close to 80-100 bags of Blue Weed per year. The collected group has felt they cannot keep ahead of the Blue Weed spreading. Being volunteers to this project it is discouraging to revisit the same areas each year to the same amount of work.

Blue Weed has been introduced into southwestern Alberta at an alarming rate. Since access is limited to Shell and a few ranchers into the front ranges, it is felt that industry is the main cause of transport of weed seeds through vehicles and gravel being brought into the area for road ways and well sites. A vast majority of Blue weed is now in and along the water sheds and pipeline right of ways.

This perennial plant is very prickly and deep rooted and gloves must be worn when handling Blue Weed. Since it grows in disturbed areas, such as gravel and rocky areas, digging up the root is very strenuous and difficult – damaging the ends of shovels and causing sore backs of volunteers. I have spent many days in the Castle wilderness hand pulling and digging toxic and invasive plants, damaging one shovel along the way.

The MD of Pincher Creek requires that all the bagged plants must be incinerated because of the seriousness of the spread of seeds.

Since the wide spread of Blue weed is accruing along watersheds, weed control by spraying is not possible! Other intrusive invasive weeds in this area are: Hound's Tongue, Dalmatian Toad Flax, Canadian Thistle, Oxeye Daisy, Burdock, and Mullein.

Encroachment of these invasive non native plants/weeds, esp. Blue Weed has traveled all the way in to Scarpe Creek and the MS Camp on the South Castle.

I would value Shell's stewardship to come forward with a more proactive, even radical approach in controlling and eradicating invasive and toxic plants.

WEEDS in the Carbondale River Drainage is a rangeland of meadows in the valley. It has become a sea of invasive Oxeye Daisies – brought into this area. Oxeye Daisies are avoided by all animals and are not eaten. This plant encroaches and crowds out all other

edible plants, and the situation continues to get worse each year. ASRD is unable to control the out break of this plant and many others, due to lack of funding and manpower.

When any toxic and invasive plant gets a foot hold in an area it is extremely difficult to eradicate. It is my hope that these invasive and toxic plants do not enter into new areas, and hope that with ASRD and Shell working together to close off more roads and access to ORV use, they will succeed in cleaning it up.

It is very frustrating to see the Castle wilderness and Front Range Canyons over taken by these invasive and toxic plants. These grasslands and watersheds were at one time pristine as you all know and opening up the area with roads have changed all this: for the flora and fauna. The rampant over use of ORVs, overgrazing, random camping and industrial use have all contributed, and little is being done to give back to the land.

We all need to look forward and do a lot more for cleaning up the environment. Can Shell step up their commitment by 2-3 fold for the environment? We need weed control and removal, road closures, revegetation of all leases and roads that are no longer needed, better erosion control around creeks and water sheds, and no further development in the Castle Wilderness.

Of the groups that benefit from income from the valleys in the Castle, it is Shell who benefits the most.

2. RE-VEGETATION We discussed earlier in the hearing about a recent road closure across the road from the proposed well site 10-01 on the 7 Gates Road. It has been brought to my attention that this road had been used by Shell to access their pipeline to the north and that Shell also used the grassland area for a parking lot that is now being proposed as a damaged area and proposed well site.!!!

Mr. Creasey mentioned that Shell had attempted to re-vegetate this road but was unsuccessful. My old time saying is "If you do not first succeed – Try Try Again".

There are several restoration experts in the Pincher Creek area that could be contacted for success on a re-vegetating this grassland hill.

WELL SITE LEASE PADS – at any well site there is NO Vegetation growing. It is possible to make the conclusion that a strong chemical is being used to make the soil sterile! How does this affect the watershed when there is a run off of water with this chemical traveling with it? I am sorry I did not ask this question of the Shell panel.

3. RARE PLANTS –

The good news is that we still have rare plants and they have been identified along the 7 Gates Road at the proposed well site.

The bad news is that the rare plants are in the proposed well site area and some very close, with-in meters. Even a S1 plant – Small Baby Blue Eyes.

How can Shell be sure that some Baby Blue Eyes might have been missed within the proposed well site area?

When do Rare Plants really stop lease applications? As we also have Least Lupines on this well site proposal.

4. 6-12 Well Site Visit on July 4th/07

I drove out to the Mt. Backus proposed well site area and the 6-12 well site. It seemed strange that after being so hot and dry this summer that a large area was very wet, with water pooled in low areas around some pipes coming out of the ground. My first thought was a leak of some sort. I was also concerned about a possible danger to wildlife and livestock in the area drinking or licking at this moist/wet area, as there was not fence around the well site.

I approached a Flint Truck parked at the proposed well site area and spoke to the 2 men there working as security. I asked them to drive back to the area and look at it with me. And they did. I was given the name of the contract PR person and they felt that this could just be water from a water truck and asked if I had touched the liquid, which I had not but was tempted to. I was advised never to do such a thing and they proceeded to tell me about the Hazardous waste clean up that took place last year removing approx. 100 dump trucks of hazardous waste to a facility for storage. They said that they would bring it up at their morning safety meeting. I called the # and heard back the next day from the Flint person that the area was safe and it was only water from a contractor truck. I took it as information given, but still uneasy about it.

5. EROSION – Improvement to erosion around the Shell well sites is required. For example: Iron Creek and 6-12. At the Iron Creek creek crossing and at the well site lease on-going improvement needs to be addressed. A lot of unstable soil is washing down hill into either the creek or down the hill from the well site lease. At the 6-12 lease site, the hill to the north of the lease but inside the lease has never, to my understanding been stabilized, or re-vegetated. Why is this? After all this time that this lease site has been there, in the 1970's, has so little been done until just this year a permanent 4 stand barb wire fence went up after my July 4th visit, the fence/gate painted????? And things cleaned up! Would it be because the proposed well site would be visited by the EUB and staff, and Shell wanted to look its best???

From a personal view – my sons have asked if it would be safe for them to go into the area as they have done over the years to visit and recreate. They know that there have been problems with the Shell pipe line leaking and with flaring. They feel that this new proposed well could cause health risks to them if they were to enter into the 7 Gates Road area. This is traditionally their home base area, visiting their father and family. Their recreation in the area is strained as well, as they have enjoyed hiking the hills around their father's and on Vicky's hill.

In closing: the impact by Shell is endless and daily on the landscape. This one well will not break or make Shell's operation, but could break the livelihoods and health of many people on the 7 Gates Road, in Beaver Mines and surrounding area residents.