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## Executive Director's Report

by Jeffrey Emmett, Executive Director

The campaign to protect the Castle is growing. The national and international help that we have been getting lately is uplifting and promising. The Natural Resource Defense Council's involvement has led to 32,899 faxes sent to Shell and the Provincial government. Effort from WildCanada has resulted in 3,859 letters being sent to various departments in the provincial government. The CCWC continues to collect signatures on our Wilderness Charter in defense of the Castle as a natural landscape.

Our restoration project is in full swing—so far thousands of noxious weeds have been picked and the number kilometres of unlawful off-road vehicle trails closed continues to grow.

A paid media campaign is about to be launched this fall by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. This should help a great deal in gaining broad support for protection that is needed from the city centres.

Locally, a new approach is in the works. The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative has organized a group of people from the Crownsnest Pass and Pincher Creek areas to help bring out a local voice for conservation through a social marketing campaign.

All in all, we have a number of positive, productive initiatives in the works that make our goal of protection seem within grasp.

### Province Continues to Disappoint

But at the same time, the signals from our provincial government are getting worse. The C5 forest management plan, a new forestry plan for all of the provincial land along the East Slopes from Waterton to Kananaskis to be implemented in 2006, is moving forward with no involvement from any conservation group. We asked to be involved but were shut out.

So far, the C5 group has written off forest certification. Forest certification is a process that sets standards for environmentally, socially and economically sound forestry practices—if these are upheld, then the wood is certified as such and the consumer can feel confident that the wood they have purchased is “good wood.” There are many industry backed certification standards

that are hollow and there is the Forest Stewardship Council certification that is internationally recognized and was created and is maintained by industry, environmental groups and government agencies.

The language coming out of the C5 process in the media is all about “sustainability” but left undefined, who knows what this really means? Often, whether it is the development of the ski hill, or a sour gas field, sustainability in the Castle means only short term financial sustainability. Long term ecological sustainability has yet to be a factor in the equation.

The Minister of Energy, Murray Smith, has released the Energy Business Plan to guide the province's energy sector for the next three years. Unfortunately for the Eastern Slopes, the minister is wholly committed to oil and gas development, with as few hurdles as possible. No mention of conservation in any sense is made in the document, nor is energy conservation, and nothing in regard to habitat conservation. At least he is up front.

Add to the mix the possibility of public land sales, presently being discussed in our legislature, and the picture grows even dimmer. The dogmatic policy of our government to privatize everything continues, and the consequences to the public seem

*see Executive Report on page 2 ...*



Murray Anderson

*Bathing Lake at dawn with Drywood Mountain in the background.*



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## **Upcoming Meeting**

The next General Meeting is \_\_\_\_\_

## **Newsletter**

Editor: Judy Huntley.

This newsletter welcomes comments and/or submissions from members and others. Please send submissions by mail or e-mail to the office. Please check with the office for submission deadlines.

The opinions, evaluations, claims and assertions contained in articles appearing in the Castle Wilderness News are the responsibility of their authors, and may not reflect the policies of the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition. The office takes responsibility for articles, notices, etc., for which an author is not identified.

***Donations to CCWC are tax creditable  
and greatly appreciated.***

... *Executive Report continued from page 1*

to be getting more and more profound. Our health care, our education, and now our public lands, are apparently all better managed by the international economy than by us.

Our work to have a Judicial Review of the provincial government's decision not to require an Environmental Impact Assessment for the development of a town at Castle Mountain Resort has illustrated how fish and wildlife concerns are treated as a legal issue to be worked around and ultimately ignored, rather than an issue of public interest to be solved. It took months of waiting and hounding to finally get the hundreds of pages of government documents that prove this point, over and over again.

I am encouraged by the work we are doing and the progress we are making; given the future direction the provincial government is taking, our work has become even more important.

Human habitat is the Earth: we are indisputably connected to the health of our environment and *all* the things in it. Convincing decision makers to incorporate this fact into their land use decisions is a tough job but one worth doing. And we will keep at it. •

## ***Restoration Wrap-Up***

***September 19 and 20, 2003***

***The Restoration Wrap-Up will be a big event this year. During the fall weekend we will be ending our restoration season with a celebration. Leading up to and during this event we hope to gather seeds from native plants so as to begin a native seed bank for the area. This has never been done and would be an exciting addition to further restoration!***

***Along with hikes, trail work and other restoration activities (including great food and festivities), we encourage anyone and everyone to come out and enjoy the Castle Wilderness with us.***

***The Syncline B Group Camp is booked for this event. Bring your tent, the kids, any musical instruments, and work gloves (optional) for an awesome weekend. The camp is located on the right hand side of Highway 507 past the cross-country ski trails, but before Castle Mountain Resort.***

***Hope to see you there!***



# Castle Restoration Program Summer 2003

*by Lisa Willott, Restoration Field Laborer*

The second year of the restoration program for the Castle has gotten off to a good start. I was hired at the very end of June to help Chris Wutzke, the restoration program coordinator, with fieldwork. We were happy to have Dwayne Buffalo join the team in mid-July as part of our restoration crew. The Restoration Framework prepared by Dave Sheppard, Gary Parkstrom and Jennifer Taylor continues to act as an excellent guide to our activities.

We started the season with several trips to sites that were worked on last year. Chris was able to compare the state of ecological integrity from last year to where it's at now—and there's definitely some good news! It is exciting for Chris to see the natural regeneration of areas within only one year of the project. Illegal trails near the Carbondale road that were covered with vegetation and “hidden” from view are re-growing with lush native vegetation. Also some areas where a lot of work was done last year, such as the Syncline area, have much fewer noxious weeds.

However, there are still many places that require our help. A main focus of the restoration program is the control of invasive plants. We feel that if these alien species are controlled, native plants will return to this area and will continue to help the entire ecosystem reclaim its integrity as a natural space. Ox-eye daisy, common mullein and tall buttercup are target noxious weeds that we've seen thousands of. We've estimated that over 27,100 noxious weeds have been pulled so far! In early July, CCWC contributed to the blueweed pull organized by private landowners along Pincher Creek (see separate story). Though not occurring on public lands like the restoration program targets, it was an excellent community event that showed how people coming together can make an enormous impact.

We are also working on narrowing wide trails, and closing trail braiding (where there are unnecessary meanders off the path that meet up to the main path). We have concentrated a lot of efforts on the Syncline Brook area. As an area that has been very disturbed in the past, and that does not see much use anymore it is ideal to reap the most benefits of our restoration efforts. We've narrowed the trail in several places and transplanted tree seedlings that were growing too close together from nearby sites. If these trees survive (and they're looking good) they will naturally narrow the trails much better than we ever could!

Water flowing down bare soil (from a previous disturbance) is a major erosion problem in the Castle. On steep trails we have been combining the use of logs dragged from the forest floor with a sealing row of rocks to prevent water running straight down the trail and re-directing it back into the forest. Similar efforts made last year, up in the South Drywood Valley, are still intact and appear to be helping.

Overall we've continually reinforced the theory that invasive plants and the ill health of the environment occur close to roads, and on previously industrialized or heavily used areas. Because of the extremely high road density of the Castle, there is no doubt that there is still plenty of work to do. Restricted or controlled access for motorized vehicles, and any kind of industrial or recreational development are larger goals that would greatly help the continued restoration of the wilderness. We are reassured when we venture further into the backcountry, where there is less work for us to do because the natural vegetation and processes are still in control. We continue to hope that there will be more and more areas like this.

So far we've hiked or biked to do work into Grizzly Lake, Mill Creek, Whitney Creek, Upper Pincher Creek, Spionkop Creek, South Drywood Creek, Gardener Creek, West Castle and the Syncline Valley, and the Carbondale area. We plan on working with the Scouts along the Castle River in late August. Also, we have a few more areas yet to visit but will also continue our work in these areas to see how it progresses.

The Stewardship reports are a huge help to our work. Even brief comments from those that hike in various areas in the Castle lets us know where we should go to work. A huge thank-you to those of you who have submitted stewardship reports. If you would like to be a volunteer steward or have any questions contact Chris or Jeff in the office at 627-5059.

As I type, massive forest fires are burning in the area and undoubtedly will have huge impacts on the Castle. Though a natural fire cycle helps the succession of an ecosystem, it is too early to be able to tell what the full impacts of this fire and the fire-fighting activities will have. Because of these events, efforts at restoration in the Castle may become even more important in the years to come.

If you are interested in volunteering with restoration at any time please give us a call. We'd be happy to have you. •



## The CCWC as a Natural Area Steward for the West Castle Wetlands

by Michael Taylor

In 1998 a small portion of the Westcastle valley was set aside as an ecological reserve, as part of the Castle Special Management Area. This area, encompassing 94.16 hectares of land, is a mosaic of springs and wetlands, and home to several species of rare plants and sensitive amphibian and reptile species.

While some would argue that this is not nearly enough protection in an area as important as the Westcastle Valley, others would say it's better than nothing. Whatever the argument, the Westcastle wetland area is truly an amazing place.

In 2002, the CCWC took over the stewardship responsibilities of the wetlands. Semi-annual inspections occur at the site, during which disturbances, plant and wildlife sightings, and other information are recorded. Since taking over the stewardship role, the CCWC has noted disturbances such as off-road vehicle tracks, tree cutting, and fire rings in the area, all of which are

completely illegal. On a positive note however, amphibian and fish species continue to breed in this area, and it is home to many brilliant species of birds and other wildlife.

In reality, the Westcastle wetlands natural area is simply an island located in a sea of disturbance. A gravel road runs adjacent to the site, funnelling people to and from Castle Mountain Resort and the Westcastle Valley. The implementation of CMR's sewage lagoon, directly adjacent to the site, will no doubt compromise the integrity of the reserve's water quality and habitat effectiveness. Increased siltation from the nearby gravel road will, in time, clog the gravel beds that provide critical fish spawning habitat in the area. However, despite the challenges associated with the current "multiple use" strategy practiced in the Castle Wilderness, the CCWC is pleased and honoured to be able to keep an eye on yet another one of Southern Alberta's gems. •



## Northern Leopard Frog Survey Underway in Waterton Lakes

by Michael Taylor

In the 1970s and 1980s a wide-ranging, locally abundant amphibian species began to decline in North America—by the millions. In 1979, the first massive die off of the northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*) was observed in Alberta.

Although a few remnant breeding populations are found in the eastern portion of the province, the northern leopard has virtually disappeared from its historical range in central and western Alberta. Many theories exist regarding the cause of this massive decline. In Alberta, human-related land use changes may be reducing re-colonization efforts and success. Chemical use for pest control on farms and ranches is also at the forefront of a list of possible causes for decline. Whatever the catalyst, the massive decline of this species in many geographical regions suggests that it is not part of a regular cycle. In January 1997 the province of Alberta formally classified the northern leopard frogs as "threatened" under its Wildlife Act.

Various agencies and groups across North America have begun intensive northern leopard frog monitoring programs. In some instances, including in Alberta, reintroduction projects are currently under way to help reverse the decline. In April of this year, Waterton Lakes National Park also initiated a northern leopard frog survey. The purpose of the Waterton survey is simply to assess the status of this species within the Park.

Many lakes and ponds within Waterton were known to historically support leopard frogs, and these locations have been the primary focus of the survey. Potential habitat locations are also currently being surveyed for the presence of this species. To date, a total of approximately 95 sites have been surveyed.

Visual, D-net, and evening call surveys have been the main tools for detection used during this survey. Currently, D-net surveys are underway, as park staff look for the presence of northern leopard frog tadpoles. A final visual survey of selected sites will be conducted later this summer to look for any young of the year.

Although Waterton has a mosaic of healthy aquatic ecosystems frequented by many amphibians, unfortunately no leopard frogs have been detected in the park to date.

If you would like more information on the northern leopard frog, the Waterton survey, or if you've seen one of these frogs in your local area, feel free to contact Michael Taylor in Waterton at: <michael.taylor@uleth.ca>.



## Summary of Conservation Director's Work, April to July 2003

by James Tweedie

### Zero Tolerance Campaign

- ✓ Research and legal work on Judicial Review of Alberta Environment decision not to require Castle Mountain Resort Inc. to prepare an Environmental Impact Assessment report for their ski hill and town site development in the Westcastle Valley.
- ✓ Continuing challenges to Alberta Environment and local Pincher Creek Municipal Approvals processes regarding the expansion of sewage lagoons in the Westcastle Valley.
- ✓ Provide Natural Resources Defence Council and other partners with information to challenge Shell Canada's renewed seismic activity in the Front Range Canyons. By the end of June, NRDC members sent over 20,000 faxes to Shell and over 12,000 to the Alberta Government supporting CCWC's campaign.

### Outreach

- ✓ Local and provincial media interviews regarding ski hill and town site development and sewage lagoon issues.
- ✓ Briefings for Alberta government opposition party MLAs, Ken Nicol (Leader, Alberta Liberals) and Brian Mason (Alberta New Democrats) on issues in the Castle.

### Internal Support for CCWC Programs:

- ✓ Coordination of Dr. Brian Horejsi's Grizzly Bear Habitat Analysis and Recovery project with Alberta Ecotrust (funder).
- ✓ Articles for CCWC June 2003 newsletter, and sections for the ten year *State of the Castle* report.
- ✓ Led hikes into the Front Range Canyons to introduce Sierra Club members and others to the area.
- ✓ Liason with local Alberta government regional operations manager, Lands and Forests Division and with area biologist, Fish and Wildlife Division.
- ✓ Ongoing research and review of materials relevant to the campaign, including:
  - Shell/John Kansas study re: Carnivore Connectivity in the Castle
  - M. Neville study for AbSRD re: Carbondale Hill/O'Hagen trails
  - CMR's Matrix Solutions Grizzly Bear Habitat and Birds of Prey survey
  - CMR's Clark Ecodynamics Rare Plant survey
  - Environment Canada Species at Risk legislation •



## A Beautiful Day for the Castle AGM

by Mari Decker

The CCWC Annual General Meeting on June 14, 2003 was a sunny, well-attended, informative and delicious affair! People had a choice of two hikes—a full day hike to Big Sagebrush, led by Reg Ernst, where the wildflowers were blooming and beautiful, or an afternoon hike up Mt. Backus with James Tweedie. The little old Coalfield schoolhouse was then our quaint meeting spot, where old friends were reacquainted and new friends were made while we gathered for a truly tasty array of potluck specialties!

Ken Wright of the Bow Point Nursery in Calgary then gave a talk about the role of native plants in restoration, which allowed us to learn how to apply some of Ken's knowledge to our summer program of planned restoration activities. We then had an efficient business meeting which highlighted the activities and successes of the year, which included the Natural Resource Defense Council establishing the Castle as a Biogem, excellent collaboration with a host of other environmental groups and progress towards our common goal of protecting the Castle, excellent media coverage this year, the imminent completion of a grizzly study authored by Dr. Brian Horesji, and getting our financial books into tiptop shape.

The meeting also forecasted what is to come for the CCWC in the coming year which includes keeping the 'zero tolerance' pressure on, carrying out on-the-ground restoration work all summer, having another witness camp this summer situated near Shell's 3-D seismic project, and progressing towards our Judicial Review of the governments decision not to order an Environmental Impact Assessment for Castle Mountain Resort's planned expansion.

The last item of the meeting saw Gord Peterson returning as president, with Jillian-Lynn Lawson stepping up as vice president—we're in for a good year! Dave Keith joined as a new director and link with Sierra Club of Calgary, and Michelle Spencer returns to being a director—welcome and welcome back! Lea Clearwater is stepping down as treasurer and receives our many, many thanks! The treasurer position has been filled by Ken Poulsen who has experience in the position. Mari Decker continues as secretary, Dianne Pachal and Michael Taylor continue as directors, and Bob Campbell, Peter Lee and Gary Parkstrom continue as directors at large. Lastly, and oh so definitely not least, we heartily welcome Judy Huntley back to the fold as our newsletter editor! Thanks to everyone who attended, and here's to a great year CCWC! •



# Blueweed in the Castle

Over 70 people braved the hot weather on Saturday July 12th to pull Blueweed along the upper reaches of Pincher Creek. At the end of the day, volunteer weed pullers took 123 large green garbage bags of Blueweed from the creek.

The Blueweed pull was organized by concerned landowners and leaseholders living along the upper reaches of Pincher Creek and was attended by landowners from all along the length of the creek. The M.D. of Pincher Creek's Agricultural Service Board Fieldmen, as well as the Cows and Fish program supported this committee.

The pull area extended from the Shell field office in Pincher Canyon downstream to the Christie Mines bridge. The pull area was approximately 16 kilometres long, and all the landowners agreed to grant access to the creek for the pullers.

Following the weed pull, participants were treated to a barbecue, which was held at the staging area located at the Alberta Ranch. Childcare was also provided at the staging area throughout the day.

Organizers felt that one of the more successful aspects of the Blueweed pull was the amount of support they received from landowners and residents downstream from the picking area, as well as from individuals with no direct interest in the area. Approximately 25 landowners downstream of the pull area came out to pull weeds. Other groups such as the Bert Riggall Environmental Foundation, the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, and Shell also joined in and contributed weed pullers to the event.

Town councillor David Green also volunteered his efforts and remarked on the importance of the weed pull as a public awareness event. "Over the last few years the issue of the quality of Pincher Creek's water supply for the town has certainly come up and there has been a tendency think of the supply as being limited to the western and eastern boundaries of town," commented Green. "But an event like this demonstrates the importance of us taking responsibility for what happens downstream and upstream."

Kelly Cooley is the Agricultural Fieldman for the Agricultural Service Board, and was a member of the organizing committee and pulling crew. "I'm thrilled with the turnout for this event. It shows that the community along this creek understands the importance of working together towards a common goal. It's also very encouraging to see all the help from people who live elsewhere in our community, but felt compelled to assist their neighbours. A big thanks to all who helped out!"

This is the first year such an event has been organized along Pincher Creek, but organizers hope it will become an annual event which gains more and more support over time. In fact, organizers are hopeful that enough weed pullers will be involved next year to tackle the blueweed further downstream.

Cooley also hopes this is the beginning of a renewed sense of community cooperation between all landowners on Pincher Creek from headwaters to the Oldman River. "The landowners have shown how productive and rewarding community initiatives like this can be. Great things can happen when neighbours put aside their differences, take ownership of issues, and work together to solve them."

The event was funded thanks to financial assistance from Shell Canada. Deep Hole Locky Bell and Harvest Petroleum Sales Ltd also made contributions to the event.

## *A Blueweed Primer*

Blueweed, listed as a noxious weed under the Alberta Weed Control Act, is a biennial plant infesting many areas along the Eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Blueweed originated as a Mediterranean ornamental and herbalist planting, but has become a stubborn weed problem in North America, Russia, and Australia. Blueweed is primarily a problem in gravelly or sandy soils, is spread rapidly by equipment or trucks carrying seed-infested gravel or soil, and in watercourses during high water events.

In the Municipal District of Pincher Creek, blueweed is a particular issue along the Highway 3 corridor, as well as along the Oldman and Castle rivers, and Pincher Creek. The Agricultural Service Board and local landowners have been fighting this plant for decades. Increased recreational and industrial activity the past 20 years, coupled with flood events and subsequent repairs to road, bridge, and pipeline areas have helped spread blueweed to new areas in the M.D.

For information on blueweed control strategies, please contact the Agricultural Service Board at 403-627-4151.

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