



Reprieve for Castle Wetlands

Castle Mountain Resort freezes snowmaking application

by James Tweedie

Following a meeting at Castle Mountain Resort and field trip in the adjacent Westcastle River Wetlands Ecological Reserve in late September, CMR Inc has withdrawn its application to pump 30,000 cubic metres of water from the Westcastle aquifer for snowmaking this November.

The pivotal meeting was attended by representatives from Alberta Community Development's Parks Branch, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Alberta Sustainable Resources Development's Fish and Wildlife Division, and Matrix Solutions, CMR's hydrology and fisheries consultants, and James Tweedie for the CCWC with support from biologist Dave Mayhood. The meeting was convened to address the Statements of Concern submitted by the CCWC as Volunteer Steward of the Wetlands and by ACD's Parks Branch, as manager of the Wetlands, to Alberta Environment as part of their approval process. Those Statements of Concern had raised serious doubts about the ability of CMR to withdraw water from the aquifer without having detrimental drawdown effects on the biotic community of the wetlands, and most particularly the overwintering habitats for bull trout.

Without the CCWC's intervention, on behalf of a wide public concern that has been long recognised in the area, CMR's application would likely have been approved. CMR Inc had earlier approached the CCWC with the offer of not pursuing the CCWC for CMR's court costs accrued during the Judicial Review process, if the CCWC would refrain from making a Statement of Concern. While the Judicial Review Appeal decision had exempted CMR Inc from any comprehensive environmental impact assessment, the judgement was made on the basis that "environmental concerns, with the assistance of other regulatory processes, were manageable". Specifically, the Appeal Court noted both the Director's and Deputy Minister's letters to the CCWC that stated "a thorough review of potential environmental effects will be completed before any decisions are made on whether to issue the required approvals for this proposed development. There will be an opportunity for individuals directly affected by the development to be involved in the review" (CCWC v. Alberta, para 21) This water approval was exactly such a regulatory process as was contemplated by the Court.

Baseline studies relating to the hydrology and ecology of the Westcastle River drainage and the wetlands were first called for in the 1986 Integrated Resource Plan for the Castle and subsequently by the Natural Resources Conservation Board in 1993. As recently as 2002, at the time of the Pincher Creek Municipal District's review of their Area Structure Plan, Alberta Environment explicitly laid down its condition for CMR's plans: "A Fishery assessment of the Westcastle River is required if expansion is proposed. This is needed to assess the fishery in summer and winter conditions in the wetlands and upstream of the development. It will serve as a baseline now and will need to be updated or evaluated as a result of any proposed expansion if further water allocation is requested" (Alberta Environment letter, April 18, 2002).

CMR chose gambling over planning. The company is now looking at other options for storing spring run-off for their future snowmaking. It remains to be seen how this will be viewed by Alberta Environment, given that there is currently a complete moratorium on issuing any further licences for surface water withdrawals in the Oldman Basin.

APPEAL FOR HELP WITH COURT COSTS

—by Nancy Tripp

Castle Mountain Resort has been granted court costs for the appeal of the Judicial Review, which was generously argued on our behalf, at no charge, by Katherine Reiffenstein of Code Hunter. This is an extra expense which we have to pay beyond the legal expenses incurred previously. None of our major funders is able to help with this. If you are able and willing to contribute, it would be very much appreciated.



Corin Lohmann took the CCWC display to the Banff Mountain Film Festival to spread the word about the Castle Wilderness and the proposed Park.



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Upcoming Meeting

Meeting & Social: Saturday December 2, 2006.
Members are welcome to attend board meetings.
Please contact the office if you wish to be notified.

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.

Production: Murray Coppold. Thanks to Rosemary Coppold, who addresses, stamps, stuffs and mails the newsletter to you.

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

Coming Events of Interest in the Area

Crowsnest Conservation Society AGM: Thursday November 23, 7 PM at the Crowsnest Centre. More information: 403 562 8923, melissa.brown@crowsnestconservation.ca

Livingstone Landowners Group AGM: November 25 at 10 AM in the Lebel Mansion board room. More information at <http://www.livingstone-landowners-group.net/>

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Winter outings: A number of people have expressed interest in winter outings on either skis or snowshoes. We won't try to plan a schedule like we do for hikes in the summer, but we will try to arrange several events. If you are interested, please email or phone Corin or Judy at the office and get on the list. Let us know your skill level and if you have favorite winter routes.

Website expansion: One of our winter projects is to add a website section where interesting information from stewards and hikers can be posted and shared – for instance, bird or plant lists from a particular day's hike, and photographs. We hope to find a mapping tool where your observations can be posted—wildlife sightings, weed infestations (or, better yet, places where weeds have been removed), erosion problems or places where you have observed an erosion site improving. Let Judy know if you would like to help on this project.

Email: Please let us know your email address, and tell us if you want only to get the newsletter electronically.

Thanks to Katherine Reiffenstein and her assistant, **Karen Wheaton**, for their legal work on our behalf, and to **Dave Mayhood** of Freshwater Resources for providing professional expertise in the matter of CMR's water application.

Thanks also to the volunteers who have helped to make many events happen, and thanks again to new members and old for your memberships and donations, and to **Fanwood** and **Wilburforce** Foundations for their continued support.

20-Year Forestry Plan Stalled

by James Tweedie, Conservation Director

The C5 Forest Management Plan (FMP) that was presented to the public in its Draft version this time last year and that was due to be brought into effect on May 1, 2006, has yet to be approved. From the outset, the CCWC, together with AWA, CPAWS, and others, expressed their serious misgivings with both process and substance of this plan—as did the CrowPac advisory group at the end of its work. Conservation considerations aside, it has been the failure of the planning team to adequately consult with First Nations interests that has stalled the Plan.

With no FMP in place, Alberta Sustainable Resources Development intends to issue interim operating certificates to forest industry companies who have a stake in the C5 Annual Allowable Cut allocations (Spray Lakes Sawmills of Cochrane holds 88 per cent of the allocation), with the understanding that the operating ground rules, timber harvest sequencing and other details will remain as proposed in the Draft version—an interesting variation on their much touted “adaptive management.”

What this means for the Castle is unclear, although some critical wildlife areas of the Castle-Carbondale are targeted for some of the first of the next 20-year round of cuts. CCWC is still seeking additional information via the Freedom of Information and Privacy process. •



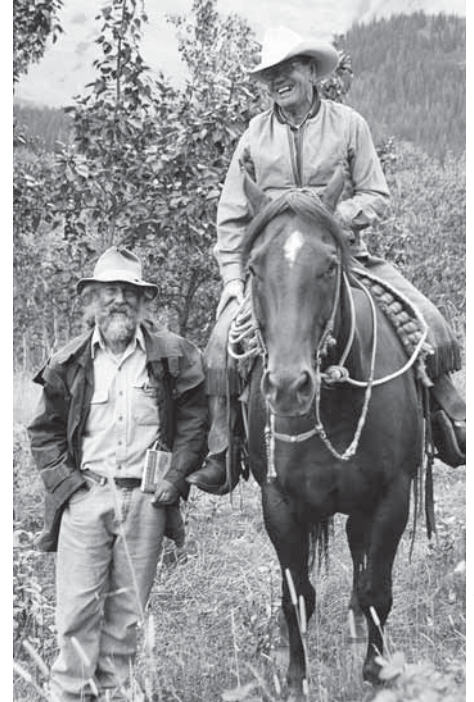
Finding Inspiration at the CEN Conference

by Corin Lohmann

I was chosen to attend this year's conference of the Canadian Environment Network as an Alberta delegate based on the premise that I could use the conference as an opportunity to meet with experts in the agriculture industry and gather information which I could bring back to CCWC. The theme of the conference this year was agriculture and the environment. The information would be used to enhance our annual Stewards rangeland and riparian health assessment seminars. So, along with four other delegates of the AEN, I was headed to Montreal for what would be a very inspiring and worthwhile four days.

While attending the various meetings and lectures, I learned a great deal about the state of the agriculture industry in Canada. The main theme was the environmental problems associated with family run farms being taken over by large scale agri-business (factory farming hogs and cattle feedlots that pollute the surrounding air and waterways), and about the need for people to support smaller, locally owned and operated family farms. The meetings also reaffirmed that the practice of grazing is a preferred method of feeding cattle.

While at the conference I also made some valuable contacts with people from other organizations across the nation, and joined the CEN's national watershed caucus as well as the agriculture caucus in order to keep informed about ongoing environmental issues across Canada as well as seek advice on activities that are going on right here in the Castle. I look forward to applying this knowledge to find new ways to bring watershed protection to the consciousness of Southern Albertans as well as ensure that grazing in the Castle continues to be a healthy and sustainable practice. •



Penny Tweedie

James Tweedie and Dick Hardy share a laugh at the Riparian Workshop.



Value of Parks to Neighboring Communities

by Cheryl Bradley

A well-attended forum on October 16 in Crowsnest Pass and 17 in Pincher Creek provided substantial grist for debates about the merits of a Castle wildland park. Scott Jones, planner with Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, pointed out that each year there is \$1.3 billion in expenditures by visitors to Alberta's Parks. Total economic activity generated is \$2.7 billion annually. In addition parks provide ecological services (protect biodiversity, contribute to clean air and water) which many consider invaluable. In a recent survey, 99 per cent of Albertans say protecting natural resources, such as parks is important to overall quality of life and 93 per cent take time to enjoy and explore Alberta's natural heritage. Currently only 4.2 per cent of Alberta is designated as provincial protected areas, over 500 sites, and another 8.3 per cent is under federal protection (mostly the mountain parks and Wood Buffalo National Park).

Jim Johnson, economist with Pacific Analytics Inc., noted that communities who treat their landscape and environment well are more likely to prosper than those that do not. Today, a prosperous future for small communities relies on attracting a well-educated and wealthy workforce who come to live there full time rather than just for weekends or holidays. These individuals will choose to live in a community that

has implemented sound land use planning and protection of recreational landscapes over one that has not. A park is a planning tool that shows respect for the landscape.

Steve Duerr, recent Executive Director of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, noted that the beauty of the area around Pincher Creek compares to that of the area around Jackson Hole in Wyoming. Protecting that beauty through designation of Yellowstone National Park in 1895 and Grand Teton National Park in 1945 is why communities in the area are so prosperous today. "It is a multi-billion dollar view." An elderly rancher and former Senator, who tried to stop park designation in the 1940s because it would affect his use of the land, admits today that he was wrong. In hindsight, designating the park was in the public interest and this was of much higher value for future generations than accommodating the private interests of a few short-sighted, traditional land users at the time. •

Reprinted from the Southern Alberta Group for the Environment newsletter.

Summaries of the speakers' presentations as well as related information and recent media are available at www.sierraclub.ca/wilderness.



Meeting with Minister of Community Development

by Gordon Petersen

On October 24, Sid Marty, Dr. David Schindler, and Dr. Brian (Barney) Reeves, representing the committee of notable Canadians proposing the Andy Russell–I'tai sah kòp Park; Dianne Pachal representing the Sierra Club of Canada; Joe Obad representing the Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society; and myself representing the CCWC met with the Minister of Community Development, the Honourable Denis Ducharme, to discuss the Andy Russell–I'tai sah kòp Park proposal. Joining Mr. Ducharme were several senior members of his Ministry, as well as a representative from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. As Minister of Alberta Community Development, Mr. Ducharme is responsible for Parks and Protected Areas. Minister Ducharme reminded us that Community Development is not undertaking the establishment of any parks or protected areas involving public lands at this time. He did, however, listen carefully to the arguments in favour of establishing a park in the Castle.

Dr. Reeves spoke about the significance of the area to the Piikani people, and about the large number of cultural sites that would receive improved protection if a park were to be established. Sid Marty talked briefly about the area's history but, as he said, we could have continued talking about its historical significance all day. Recent hydrological information has shown that while the Castle represents less than 4 per cent of the area of the Oldman River Basin, it provides some 30 per cent of the recorded water flow for the entire arid region. For this reason alone, Dr. Schindler argued that the Castle should be given protective park status, and that it should be given that status sooner rather than later.



New Premier Soon

As we go to press, only two of the leadership candidates have put forward strong environmental positions. According to the Conservation Voters of Alberta, "two leadership candidates, Jim Dinning and Dave Hancock, are knowledgeable and open about the environmental problems facing Alberta and they have given considerable thought to developing and articulating solutions to these problems. Both candidates have committed to setting firm targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, developing a provincial land use strategy that balances resource development with environmental protection, protecting wildlife habitat, and implementing the Water for Life Strategy." For more information, go to <http://www.conservationvoters.ab.ca/leadership.htm>.

Write!

The day you know who the new leader is, please write and tell him that you seriously want the Andy Russell–I'tai sah kòp Park to be established in the Castle Wilderness. Copy

While Minister Ducharme did not make any commitments regarding establishing a park, he did say that his department would endeavour to do more education and outreach work in the southwest region regarding the full spectrum of protected area designations available, the value of protected areas, and the role of Alberta Community Development.

Minister Ducharme also said that he would continue to have discussions with the Honourable David Coumts regarding the proposed Andy Russell–I'tai sah kòp Wildland Park and Provincial Park, including the need for prompt action regarding adverse cumulative impacts, the C5 Forest Management Plan (which would result in more clearcut logging in the Castle), and damage from random camping and off-road motorized recreation.

We also encouraged Minister Ducharme to proceed with improving the internal government referral process between departments by enlarging the 1974 Crown Reservation (Park) to encompass the entire Castle, and preferably to "upgrade" it to a Protective Notation (PNT) class of Crown Reservation. If the Castle were to receive a PNT, other government departments would have to notify Community Development, and give it a chance to comment, before any new development was allowed.

So, did we come away from the meeting with a new park? No. Was the meeting a good chance to meet with the Minister, and to explain our proposal to him? Definitely. •

by Judy Huntley, Executive Director

your letter to the Ministers of Community Development, Sustainable Resource Development, and Environment. Addresses will be available at www.ccwc.ab.ca. As reported in the *Prairie Post* on November 3, Mr Coumts told their reporter that the proposal is now in Minister Ducharme's hands. •

Christmas Bird Count

Sam Miller is organizing this event again. The centre of the count circle will be at the junction of Highways 507 and 776 (Beauvais Lake road junction off the road from Pincher to Beaver Mines). Participants should plan to meet at Phil Hazelton's house in the Gladstone Valley on the morning of the count and again in the evening to tally and share observations. Dinner, drinks, etc. will be available. A \$5 charge per person will go to Bird Studies of Canada. Please contact Sam directly to get details or directions: 403 627 3275 or sammiller@telus.net •