



Vol. 12, No. 3, September 2002



## Castle Mountain Resort—

### *The expansion proposal, the issues, and CCWC's response*

Castle Mountain Resort, in the heart of the Castle Wilderness, is proposing to greatly expand its ski terrain, and to more than double the number of residences and commercial facilities in the village.

#### Environmental Assessment

No agency has been given the authority to consider the total impact of this expansion on the surrounding lands. Alberta Environment has responsibility for water and sewage, the Lands and Forest service of Sustainable Resource Development has authority to grant the expanded License of Occupation onto Haig Ridge, and the Municipal District of Pincher Creek has the responsibility to consider the Area Structure Plan for the village.

CCWC strongly holds the opinion that until some authority is able to understand the whole picture to the point that it can ensure the continuing health of the ecosystem, expansion of the resort should not be approved. To this end, CCWC has requested an Environmental Impact Assessment. However, the Director of Assessment has chosen not to order one. CCWC is taking legal advice as this issue goes to press, and will seriously consider taking legal action to get this decision reviewed.

#### The Village Expansion

On July 23, 2002, a public hearing was held by the Pincher Creek Municipal District Council to consider the Area Structure Plan presented recently by Castle Mountain Resort for the proposed expansion of the village and base area facilities. At the hearing, CMR people provided a history of the facility and explained that they want to increase users by building sufficient housing development to finance new infrastructure. Their plan is to develop Haig Ridge for skiing and add 137 new housing units (both single and multi family dwellings) to the 88 units presently there. At this time, according to manager Brian Cusak, the resort is losing money, and considers that it needs more than 60,000 skiers, as well as additional beginner and intermediate ski terrain, to become sustainable.

All the CMR presenters emphasized the importance of the expansion to both employment and family recreation

opportunities as well as recreation for seniors and the disabled. The president of the Westcastle Ski and Snowboard Club assured the Council that “the dreams of our youth will die if CMR is not allowed to grow and develop to sustainability.”

The other primary point made by CMR was that MD Council had no authority to consider anything beyond the 110 acres of private land on which the village expansion is planned. Their advice was that all environmental concerns be referred to the federal and provincial agencies for review, and that “it would not be an appropriate way to give credence to environmental issues, to turn this down because of many loud letters expressing environmental concerns.” CMR supporters also pointed out how important the resort is in keeping ratepayers’ taxes low, and noted that “CMR has a stellar environmental record and is a great public citizen,” “everything is great if you look beyond the propaganda of the nay-sayers,” and “I know you can trust these people.”

People that were not supporting the approval of the plan tended to be concerned about, and to encourage the Council to consider, the big picture.

Comments from campers and area residents included:

- “This is about profiteering from real estate in the Rocky Mountains.”
- “There cannot really be an economically sustainable ski development here since the location is subject to years with no snow and will always be in danger of being severely damaged by fire.”
- “I too have a vested interest in what happens in the Westcastle valley. This will directly impact the whole valley. These areas are priceless. The ASP affects not only the resort but also the valley. This is a case of a small group of individuals representing their private interests. But I represent the public who own the land around.”

Probably the most riveting presentation was from Kevin Weinburger, Chief of Emergency Services, who said that we need the ability to pass fire bylaws there, and presently do not have

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### CCWC Board of Directors

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### Upcoming Meetings

The fall Restoration Celebration and General Meeting is on Saturday, September 14, place to be announced. Check the website or contact the office for details.

Our next board meeting will be on the Friday evening of September 13, before the Restoration Celebration day. All are welcome; contact the office for details.

### Newsletter

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.*

## Restoration Project

### *We Need Your Help*

CCWC works to protect and restore the Castle Wilderness, and plans to reverse the damage that the Castle has suffered for too long. Restoration work begins in earnest this summer. With volunteer help, our projects will reduce erosion, recover habitat and reduce the impact of invasive weeds. Your involvement will increase the project's chance of success.

If you enjoy being outdoors in a wilderness setting and are willing to contribute your effort to improve the state of this precious Crown land, we would love to have your help—for a day, a weekend or longer.

The restoration areas are mainly in the backcountry. CCWC will provide tools and direction as well as a base camp and groceries. If you are staying for more than a day you will need to provide your personal camping gear. For more information, contact the office. Visit [www.ccwc.ab.ca](http://www.ccwc.ab.ca) to read the background report on this initiative.

## New Staff

Chris Wutzke is now working full time for CCWC and is taking a lead role in the restoration, stewardship, and hiking programs. In addition, he is providing essential expertise to the other staff and volunteers as we make the transition from the old Macintosh computer to the modern PC world. After two months mostly in the office he is very pleased to be spending serious time in the field on projects that will actively diminish the human footprint in the Castle.

Chris brings to the organization a diploma in Watershed studies and a degree in Environmental Science. He also has extensive field experience particularly in reducing incursions of exotic plant species in sensitive areas. Chris lives with his wife in Beaver Mines and is a keen and skillful soccer player.

## Volunteer Opportunities

All volunteer contributions are welcome and appreciated. Please consider

- joining the Board or the newsletter committee
- becoming the Steward of a particular area of the Castle
- helping out with Restoration field work (please see the website for a description of this project).
- giving a presentation about the Castle Wilderness to an organization or classroom that you have a connection to. We can provide brochures, display materials, and slide shows.

Interested? Contact the office: [office@ccwc.ab.ca](mailto:office@ccwc.ab.ca) or 403 627 5059.

that authority. To be confident of being able to protect the area we would require:

- fire-safe homes,
- upgraded roads,
- vehicle maneuverability,
- access and egress,
- maintenance on closed cabins on a weekly if not daily basis,
- quads and snowmobiles to haul hoses,
- adequate water for firefighting, which is not there,
- training for urban interface fires and safety issues,
- manpower,
- storage facilities,
- better propane arrangements, and
- power lines underground.

He also noted that because of the placement of propane tanks behind each residence, there would be a high danger of explosions in any significant fire, and said that Alberta Forest Protection would be unable to send water bombers, and that he couldn't send men into that danger either. His final comment was that "liability issues are not being met in most aspects at CMR. Let's rebuild the plan to address that."

In addition to the verbal presentations, all the letters that had been received before July 17 were then read into the record. In support of the CMR ASP there were 406 form letters and 25 individual letters, which included comments like "support as long as environmental concerns are addressed," "the healthy environment is the main draw," "an exemplary model in environmental sustainability," "skiing has little effect on wildlife," "must address concerns on surrounding lands and enforce the Access Management Plan," and "the Haig expansion has been approved; the lagoon is approved; the footprint will not change; the impact on wildlife will not change. The NRCB report was so badly flawed it was impossible to implement. CMR could likely sue if its proposal is turned down. I trust you will make the right decision and approve the ASP."

Council had by July 17 also received 266 form letters and 15 individual letters that were not in support of the CMR ASP. Points in the individual letters included:

- "Very opposed for environmental reasons and because it impacts the recreational opportunities of others."
- "MD considers the effect on neighbours in its decisions. In this case that includes the public—owners of the land—and wildlife."
- "Request an EIA of the province."

The presentation made by James Tweedie was on behalf not only of CCWC but also of CPAWS, AWA, FAN, and Trout Unlimited. In addition, submissions were made by the Montana Wilderness Association, CPAWS, and AWA. It and a previous brief to Council are on the CCWC website or can be obtained from the office (e-mail <office@ccwc.ab.ca> or call 403 627 5059).

Dave Brown of Chinook Health Region expressed concerns, as did Cliff Thiessen, the manager of Parks and Protected Areas in Lethbridge, who said that the expansion is likely to have an impact on the adjacent Westcastle Wetlands Ecological Reserve, and that the proposed method of disposal of treated effluent is a concern, as are the general impacts to be expected from the expanded population.

Peter Lamb, the superintendent of Waterton Lakes National Park, said that CMR has impacts on shared international wildlife species. He noted an anticipated habitat loss and decline of regional grizzly population with no effective mitigation possible. He asked council to endorse the NRCB review and noted that new knowledge not available at the time of that EIA is relevant to this issue. Finally, he said "your decision will have a direct impact on our interests and those of other jurisdictions; these impacts will be permanent and irreversible."

On August 13, MD Council considered how to proceed with the CMR proposal and, taking advice from Council's planner, decided that the concerns of the public could be addressed by including in the Area Structure Plan an Addendum that would ensure that no development will take place until:

- fire and human safety concerns have been solved,
- there is clarification of the content and timing of Comprehensive Siting Plans,
- an Environmental Management Plan is in place,
- all other responsible agencies have signed off, and
- a mechanism is in place to monitor and review the development.

With agreement in principle that wording on those points would be worked on over the next week or two, Council gave unanimous assent to second reading of the Plan, and agreed to consider giving third reading at the next meeting, September 12.

#### **Individual action:**

CCWC staff and directors note with appreciation the hundreds of letters of concern that were submitted to the MD Council in advance of the hearing, many of which were as a result of the newspaper insert placed by CPAWS in the Lethbridge Herald and the Pincher Creek Echo.

Concerned CCWC members are encouraged to contact the office if they want more detailed information, and to contact their MLA and Ministers Taylor and Cardinal as well as Mr Klein to express their opinion about the importance of EIA, and of healthy wilderness in the Castle. •

*From across the lake  
The wild cry of a raven  
Echoed back and forth.*

—Haiku, by Patricia Wagenaar



# What's New?

## A CCWC Update

### Thanks to the volunteers

All our volunteers are greatly appreciated. Your work makes this organization function. Particular thanks go out to the Board, whose tasks continue to multiply as CCWC stretches in ever more directions.

The hike leaders have done a terrific job this season, with more hikes than ever in unusually challenging weather conditions. Several people have taken on more than one hike, and many have sent in stewardship reports afterward. Thanks! The ability of CCWC members to do many things at once is exemplified by Patricia Wagenaar. In addition to sharing her knowledge of the best places in the Castle Wilderness to find wonderful flowers, she is a poet whose haiku and tanka tributes to the land are scattered around this issue of the newsletter.

Many thanks to the restoration volunteers, whose efforts move us another step toward healthy wilderness in the Castle. And sincere thanks to the hundreds of CCWC members who sent in their renewals so quickly this year. Your promptness, as well as the fact that so many of you sent donations beyond the membership fee, is a wonderful affirmation that you the members still feel that the attempt to protect and restore the Castle Wilderness is a worthwhile effort.

### Thanks to the funders

To accomplish its work, CCWC needs major funding sources in addition to volunteer efforts and member donations. The recent or ongoing support of the World Wildlife, Wilburforce, and Kendall Foundations has been crucial to keeping CCWC's general programs growing and increasingly effective. Grants from Alberta Ecotrust, the MacLean and Calgary Foundations, Mountain Equipment Coop, and TD Friends of the Environment have supported specific projects. Now, the EcoAction program of Environment Canada has made it possible to launch two years of restoration activities that will build on the restoration study *Bringing it Back*.

### Restoration Study Available

*Bringing it Back: A Restoration Framework for the Castle Wilderness*, a comprehensive 175-page document by Dr David H. Sheppard, Gary Parkstrom, and Jennifer C. Taylor, is now available on the CCWC website ([www.ccwc.ab.ca](http://www.ccwc.ab.ca)) and in hard copy for \$25 by request from the office. Copies may also be viewed at, or borrowed from, the CCWC office, the University of Lethbridge Library, the Pincher Creek Library, and the Pincher Creek Museum.

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### AGM 2002

CCWC held its 2002 Annual General Meeting on May 25. One of the Big Snowstorms of the spring of 2002 made it impossible to hold the weekend of outdoor activities that had been scheduled for the Beauvais Lake area. However, 20 stalwart members convened at the Lebel Mansion in Pincher Creek to transact CCWC's annual business, and to hear Michael Gerrand of Cows and Fish, Jim Clark of AB Fish and Wildlife, and John Hancock, arachnologist, speak about the state of wildlife and the environment in the Castle. President Gary Parkstrom reviewed the year's accomplishments: the restoration study, the fall celebration, new staff, a strategic planning process, and funding for new projects for the summer.

Conservation Director James Tweedie noted that it's wonderful to have young people rejuvenating the organization, and spoke about the importance of the government decisions being made about the Castle Mountain Resort expansion. As a result of the strategic planning, we have achieved much greater coordination with CPAWS, AWA and Sierra Club, and are moving forward toward our common goal. As lead group on the local front, we have worked with the government line agencies (fish and wildlife, public lands, forestry) as they restructure, establishing relationships with the new people, and are putting extra energy into the hiking and stewardship programs. They are organized and ready to go, let's jump into them.

Two new Directors joined the board: Lea Clearwater (treasurer) and Valerie Haig-Brown, both of the Waterton-Twin Butte area. Since the AGM, Gary Parkstrom has temporarily left the role of president to teach earth education in Ontario for the summer and to travel (adventurously indeed) in Mexico during the fall and early winter. The signing authorities for the year are Gord Petersen, Ken Poulsen, Lea Clearwater, and Jillian Lynn Lawson.

Thanks to past-president Klaus Jericho for putting massive effort into nominating CCWC for an Emerald award, and congratulations to all CCWC members for making this an organization whose excellence was recognized at the provincial level by being short-listed for the Community award.

*The mountainsides were  
Hung with the most glorious  
Autumn tapestries.  
And the vibrant colours were  
All reflected in the lake.*

—Tanka, by Patricia Wagenaar