



Vol. 20, No. 1, March 2010



## Castle Special Place milestone reached

*But logging planned before regional plan will be done*

*by Dianne Pachal*

It's a great time for CCWC members to update themselves on what's happening on the ground in the Castle Special Place, with the proposal to legislate it as a protected area ([castlespecialplace.ca](http://castlespecialplace.ca)), and to pass their comments on to their MLA, municipal councilors and the Ministers.

Early this January, the Tourism, Parks and Recreation Minister, Cindy Ady, wrote the Castle Special Place working group and copied the Environment Minister, Rob Renner; local MLA Evan Berger (also Parliamentary Assistant for Sustainable Resource Development, SRD) and Chair of South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (RAC) noting the following about the proposal.

- "... proposal has a strong fit with the Terms of Reference ... for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan ..."
- "I have asked my staff ... to draw from your work in their own roles and responsibilities for supporting the development of the Regional Plan."
- "... impressed with the scope and scale of participation on your Working Group."
- "... Castle Special Place Working Group has successfully engaged the community and stakeholders ..."

Unfortunately, even though the Honourable Ted Morton while Minister of SRD announced that he was deferring approval of the 20 year logging plan for the headwaters of the Oldman River Basin (Crowsnest Forest or C5 Forest Management Plan) pending the state of the watershed report, SRD and Spray Lake Sawmills has scheduled the Castle for clear-cut logging come freeze-up, late this year. That will be prior to completion of the South Saskatchewan Regional Land-Use Plan. This winter the company, whose sawmill is located west of Calgary in Cochrane, was in the Castle planning the logging.

It will certainly come to a head whether the primary "water tower" for all those in the Oldman River Basin will be logged come freeze-up or whether it will finally get legislated protection like the other 80 Special Places, including places

like the Wildland Parks for the Town of Slave River's water source and which protect more of Calgary's source.

CCWC is a participant in the Castle Special Place Citizen's Initiative. The working group (34 groups and interests) submitted the conceptual proposal to the Alberta Government last November. The proposal recommends the Castle Special Place (except the Castle Mt Resort leases and titles) be legislated and managed as a Wildland (1,023 km<sup>2</sup>) under the Provincial Parks Act, along with integration of some small Provincial Recreation Areas, Provincial Parks and the current little West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve totaling an additional 12 km<sup>2</sup>. •

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## Klaus Jericho's early CCWC history

Klaus did a wonderful job as president of CCWC for many years, and has just completed a history of our early years. It is very good. Unfortunately it won't fit in this newsletter. Look it up at [ccwc.ab.ca](http://ccwc.ab.ca), or, if you don't have access to the internet, please request a print copy from Carolyn.

Klaus says "Readers will learn of the challenge accepted by the volunteers involved. Nobody told them to get involved. They did it because they knew that it was the right thing to do for life in the long-term in Southern Alberta. Curiously, throughout these years Alberta Government Agencies were not an ally in this effort to protect the Castle Wilderness, instead they focussed on multi-use and mitigation. CCWC efforts in data and information collection failed to get government support for our vision and mission. The struggle by CCWC and other like-minded organizations to protect the Castle Wilderness is ongoing to this date. The reader will learn of the struggle CCWC had to define the process of protecting a Special Place in Alberta. It is hoped that this review of the early history of the CCWC will be of helpful and inspirational for other groups." •

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#### Staff

Carolyn Aspeslet, Executive Director  
(address/phone/e-mail as above)

James Tweedie, Conservation Director  
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#### Upcoming Meeting

CCWC's Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday, May 15 from 10:00 to 2:30 at the Lebel Mansion in Pincher Creek. It will be followed by a hike in the Castle Wilderness. Please join us—and consider becoming a Director

Members are welcome at directors meetings.  
Contact the office to be put on the notification list.

#### Membership

Note the CanadaHelps button on the website for donations by credit card—and thanks to those who have used it already!

#### 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.  
Alberta's new Community Spirit Program  
means that both you and CCWC will benefit  
more from your contributions.*



## Coalition News

by Judy Huntley

### Major flood damage at CCWC office

In the cold of mid-December, on an icy Saturday afternoon, a pipe burst upstairs above the CCWC office in the Lebel Mansion. By the time the problem had been discovered and James had been notified, there were several inches of water on the floor, the ceiling was down, and many things were ruined (see photo on page 6 of the web edition of this newsletter). James rescued what he could from the chaos. The insurance crew, a day or two later, took various things including the computers to Lethbridge. Fortunately the computers were not damaged, but the printer and other hardware was lost. If you have wondered why things have been slow—for instance, this newsletter is badly overdue—it is because of energy being diverted into the rescue effort and the hiring process.

There's nothing happening yet to repair the flooded office, and it will probably be some time before anything starts. The office we used to have on the second floor of the Lebel (NW corner) has just become available, and Carolyn is busy moving in as well as learning the very many jobs that are part of her new position (see Executive Director story on page 3).

### Renew your membership, volunteer, and contribute

CCWC has been quite successful for many years at acquiring grant dollars for many of our projects, on-the-ground work, written studies, and outreach, as well as the basic infrastructure (the office, communications costs, volunteer support, and administration). But grant monies are scarcer now. If you can, please renew your membership, give a few memberships as gifts to people who care, volunteer if you're able, contribute a bit extra this year, and let Carolyn know if you have ideas for funding sources that we haven't tapped yet. •



## Thanks

Many thanks to our funders: RBC Blue Water, the Community Spirit Fund, Fanwood and Wilburforce Foundations, Ecotrust, and the Alberta Conservation Association, which has been very generous this year in supporting the expansion of our field work to include observation of Species at Risk.

Those of you who were able to contribute money in 2008 had your donations matched by the Community Spirit program. We are told this will happen again this year, and hopefully this program will continue into the future

Thanks also to the many people who applied for the position of Executive Director. We had a wonderful array of people apply, we had extremely interesting conversations with you and we greatly appreciate your interest. We look forward to your engagement in CCWC's future work. •



# Pre-Hearing for Shell's Mt Backus hearing

Round two

by James Tweedie

A large number of people managed to attend the February 10 ERCB Pre-Hearing Meeting to express their concerns over Shell's multiple applications at both the Mt Backus site and the Castle River Development (CRD). Shell argued that their "business schedule dictates the need for a decision by September for the Waterton 68 site or November for the CRD applications" and therefore wanted a Single Consolidated Hearing to be held in May.

Interventions from interveners, including the CCWC, all argued for the separation of the applications and for a hearing in the fall at the earliest. The Board ruled after a short break at the end of the session that there will be a hearing on the Waterton 68/Mt Backus well applications in September in Pincher Creek. The rest of their determinations will be released shortly.

CCWC is pleased not to have to argue for intervenor status this time around. Shell has agreed that those parties who had been accepted as interveners at the previous Mt Backus Hearing would be accepted by Shell again (despite the new reduced emergency planning zone that has come into effect this past year, which would have excluded a number of our members in Beaver Mines). This makes things a whole lot simpler as we go forward, as it will allow our lawyer to work in the certainty that the discussion at the end of the day will be over line item amounts, not the overall right to intervene.

CCWC members with a particular interest in this matter are encouraged to send CCWC a letter stating your concerns, with copies to Shell, and the ERCB. If you are a resident in the area of either of these proposed developments, that is very helpful. Please email or phone James at 403-628-2422 or [jtweedie@xplornet.com](mailto:jtweedie@xplornet.com) if you want to discuss this or any other matters as we go forward. •



## Introducing our new Executive Director

*Gordon Petersen, CCWC President, writes:*

Please let me introduce our new Executive Director, Carolyn Aspeslet.

Carolyn and her family have recently relocated to Alberta after having lived in Revelstoke, BC for a number of years. While in Revelstoke, Carolyn gained extensive experience in the outdoor tourism and NGO sectors. I'm looking forward to working with Carolyn, and to drawing on the new ideas and perspectives she brings to the job. Please drop into the new office upstairs in the Lebel Mansion, phone, or send Carolyn a note to say hello when you get a chance.

I also want to say a big **Thank You!** to Judy Huntley for her dedication, enthusiasm, and hard work for all these years, and to wish her all the best in her retirement

*Carolyn Aspeslet responds:*

Although raised in Alberta; I spent the last 13 years in Revelstoke, BC, moving back to Alberta about a year and a half ago. During my years in Revelstoke I worked for several years as the Executive Director and the Project Director for an environmental non-profit society. I also spent a few years in tourism sales and marketing. This has given me a good deal of insight into the many sides of the environmental dilemmas that are prominent throughout all areas.

In my new position as Executive Director of Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition I am looking forward to continuing the great work that has already been accomplished in the area. I also look forward to getting out to hike and taking in the beauty of the wilderness that surrounds us here.

Castle-Crown will be offering a summer hiking program again this year and I hope you will come out and join us. If you have time to do a little volunteer work we would greatly appreciate your help. We have moved upstairs in the Lebel Mansion to #202. Stop by and say hello, become a volunteer or sign up for a hike; I look forward to meeting you. If you would like to find out more about the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition please visit our website at [www.cwc.ab.ca](http://www.cwc.ab.ca). •



South Drywood Canyon hike, summer 2009.  
Photo by Karin Buhrmann

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### Grizzly Bear Recovery

Please write decision-makers and encourage them to support recovery of grizzlies in Alberta. For more information check out the Wildlands Advocate at <http://albertawilderness.ca/wla/2010/2010-02-vol.-18-no.-1-wild-lands-advocate> •



# Notes

by Judy Huntley

## Thanks to Jim Cameron, Wildsight pilot

For years, CCWC director Jim Cameron has been Wildsight's only Canadian pilot, though he tells me there are others now. This year he gave one of our Wilburforce colleagues an opportunity to see the Castle Wilderness from above. Earlier in the year he had, for several days, given conservation photographer Garth Lenz access to wonderful aerial shots of both the beauty and the damage in BC's Flathead. Now the Flathead has, suddenly, been given protection by the BC government. If you've missed this story, check out <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/feb2010/2010-02-10-01.html>.

The moral of this story is, never tire of writing decision makers in Alberta and urging them to protect the Castle, or offering your particular skills, as Jim has, to getting the story out.



# PlantWatch

by Mari Decker

**D**o you regularly visit a location in the Castle Wilderness? If so, you can help assess the effects of climate change by noting when certain plant species bloom!

How to do it? Select an area and plants that you can observe frequently during the blooming season. You may want to pick just one or two species to start with. Go for a walk before flowers begin to bloom, to find your plant(s). Try to choose specimens growing in an easy-to-access, flat area. Plants on a cool, north-facing slope usually flower later; and those on a warm, south-facing slope bloom earlier than plants on level ground. Avoid sites which may have unusual temperature or light conditions. For trees and large shrubs, temporarily mark an individual plant with a tag. For smaller plants, find a typical patch of the species to observe. Photograph or GPS your plant (or patch of plants) so you are confident you are observing the same plants on each visit. Watch your plant closely in spring, checking for swelling flower buds. Record the date your plant reaches first bloom. (For most plants, first bloom is when the first flowers open, revealing the stamens.) In some cases you will report when flowers have opened in three different places on your shrub or tree, or in three places within the patch of plants you are observing. Visit your plants at least every few days to catch the first day they bloom. Record the date when your plant reaches mid-bloom. For tree species and lilac, report leafing dates as well. A note about etiquette: Please do not collect wildflowers. This weakens the plants and robs them of the energy needed to bloom the following year. Wildflowers are best enjoyed in their native habitat!

The Observation Form and additional info is at <http://www.plantwatch.ca/english/plantwatch/intro.html>. There is also a regional coordinator who can help with questions, e.g., plant identification, determining the latitude/longitude location of your plants. When you submit data electronically, it's added instantly to the web maps showing bloom dates across Canada, so your observations make a difference right away! Help us expand on our understanding of what's going on in the Castle Wilderness. The plants being watched in Alberta are noted in the table. •

## Information Kiosk in the Westcastle Valley

**James Tweedie writes:** When the Castle Special Management Area was designated in 1998, the Alberta government committed to supporting public education materials and especially for financial support for implementing and enforcing the Castle Access Management Plan. Neither of those commitments lasted more than two years.

The CCWC has applied for a licence for an Information Kiosk in the Westcastle Valley to serve a multi-functional purpose for all agencies involved in managing our public lands, as well as providing the value-added interpretive and educational information about the biological and botanical conservation values of the WWER that are the specific interests of the CCWC (See full text on page 5 of the web edition of this newsletter or at [www.cwc.ab.ca](http://www.cwc.ab.ca)) •

Common Name	Scientific Name	Note
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	non-native
Common purple lilac	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	non-native
Wild strawberry	<i>Fragaria virginiana/vesca</i>	forb, herb
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	forb, herb
Prairie crocus, prairie anemone, pasque flower	<i>Anemone patens</i>	forb, herb
Bunchberry, dwarf cornel	<i>Cornus canadensis</i>	forb, herb
Cloudberry, bake-apple, salmonberry	<i>Rubus chamaemorus</i>	forb, herb
Early blue violet, hookedspur violet	<i>Viola adunca</i>	forb, herb
Golden bean, prairie bean, golden banner	<i>Thermopsis rhombifolia</i>	forb, herb
Northern bedstraw	<i>Galium boreale</i>	forb, herb
Purple saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga oppositifolia</i>	forb, herb
Starflower	<i>Trientalis borealis</i>	forb, herb
Star-flowered Solomon's seal, wild spikenard	<i>Maianthemum stellatum</i>	forb, herb
Bearberry	<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	dwarf shrub
Cranberry, partridgeberry, lingonberry	<i>Vaccinium vitis-idaea</i>	dwarf shrub
Mountain avens, alpine dryad	<i>Dryas integrifolia/octopetala</i>	dwarf shrub
Twinflower	<i>Linnaea borealis</i>	dwarf shrub
Choke cherry	<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	shrub
Labrador tea	<i>Ledum groenlandicum</i>	shrub
Saskatoon, serviceberry, june-berry	<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	shrub
Silverberry, wolf willow	<i>Elaeagnus commutata</i>	shrub
Aspen poplar, trembling aspen	<i>Populus tremuloides</i>	tree
Larch, tamarack	<i>Larix laricina</i>	tree
Lodgepole pine	<i>Pinus contorta</i>	tree
Paper birch, white birch, Alaska birch	<i>Betula papyrifera/neoalaskana</i>	tree



# Information Kiosk in the Westcastle Valley

by James Tweedie

When the Castle Special Management Area was designated in 1998, the Government of Alberta committed to providing support for the area in its annual budget allocation to Alberta Sustainable Resources Development, for the provision of public education materials and especially for financial support for implementing and enforcing the Castle Access Management Plan. Neither of those commitments lasted more than two years.

Currently people visiting the Castle Special Management Area—Forest Land-Use Zone enter the area traveling at around 80 kms per hour as they cross the Forest Reserve Boundary between Beaver Mines and the Castle River junction and pay little regard to the signage. Equally, the Westcastle Wetlands Ecological Reserve (WWER) is almost entirely unsigned on entry and the small roadside markers are insignificant, if even visible, at vehicle speeds.

As a result, the general public has little awareness of the significance of the CSMA generally or of the WWER, particularly, and zero awareness that the Municipal District of Pincher Creek has established a small Environmental Reserve, adjacent to Castle Mountain Resort on the east side of the Westcastle River, upstream of the Ecological Reserve.

The proposed Information Kiosk would fulfill the Recommendation of the Special Places 2000 Local Committee in their “Living Document” at the time of the designation of the Westcastle River Wetlands Ecological Reserve by Order in Council #357 in 1998. Recommendation 1(i) reads: “The area should accommodate some limited development for interpretive/educational purposes”.

Since 1998, neither Alberta Tourism Parks and Recreation, responsible for the Ecological Reserve, nor by Alberta Sustainable Resources Development, currently responsible for the CSMA as a whole, has managed to see this recommendation implemented.

The Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition acts as the Volunteer Steward for the WWER, under the Alberta Parks Branch’s Volunteer Stewardship Program, and provides a monitoring and reporting function to the Parks Branch. In the fall of 2009 the CCWC assisted Alberta Parks Branch in improving the very limited signage around the Reserve, but a clear recognition and identification of this Reserve for the general public is long overdue, especially as the site has been identified by the National Geographic in its recently released Geotourism Map of the Crown of the Continent (2008).

The global significance of this Wetland ecosite has been recognized in the Final Report on the Vegetation and Rare Plant Survey of the West Castle Wetlands Ecological Reserve prepared for the Alberta Parks and Protected Areas Branch by Kestrel Research Inc (February 2007). That study also surveyed

the adjacent lands held by the Municipal District of Pincher Creek as an Environmental Reserve and confirmed its botanical significance. The concluding paragraphs of the Executive Summary give a flavor of the importance of these reserves:

“In conclusion, the Ecological Reserve status for the WWER is well justified given the relative scarcity of wetlands in the montane and subalpine natural subregions, the presence of uncommon and globally rare vegetation communities, the abundance of species restricted to the southwestern portion of the province and the abundance of rare vascular plant and bryophyte species supported in this small area.

The MD land, while not as unique as the WWER, supports an intact, representative area of upland coniferous forest on the lower slopes of Barnaby Ridge. The rough terrain, mature closed forest canopy and abundant deadfall create a diversity of habitats for bryophytes. The land is distinctly different from the WWER land and supports a number of species restricted to southwestern Alberta, one rare vascular plant species and 8 rare bryophyte species. This area is also worthy of conservation and further study for bryophyte diversity.” (Final Report, p iv)

Since the release of that Report, the Parks Branch has also undertaken further study of the aquatic species present in the WWER. Those findings can be found in a paper prepared by Cal McLeod, titled *An Overview of Groundwater Sensitive Wildlife Resources at Westcastle Wetlands Ecological Reserve*. (September, 2007) The paper highlights the importance of the Wetlands Reserve and associated river gravels for the spawning and overwintering needs of Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout. It also records observations of all life stages for Long-toed Salamanders, Columbia Spotted Frogs and Western Boreal Toads.

All the Government of Alberta Departments involved in the management of the public lands of the Castle area have recognized and expressed the need for the education of the public about the use of these lands. The 2001 Revision (Draft) of the Castle Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan emphasized the shared information, communications and education aspects of managing these lands and the need for partnerships with other non-government groups. The Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition was identified as one such partner in that document.

The presence of an Interpretive Kiosk at the location proposed, where vehicle speeds are reduced and where the serviced and maintained road ends, could serve a multi-functional purpose for all agencies involved in managing our public lands, as well as providing the value-added interpretive and educational information about the biological and botanical conservation values of the WWER that are the specific interests of the CCWC. •



*Water damage to the Coalition office following the burst pipe in December 2009. Photo by James Tweedie.*



*CCWC crew in front of the display at the recent OWC event. Photo by Andrew Hurly*