

# CASTLE WILDERNESS NEWS

Vol. 12, No. 2, May 2002



## CCWC's Second Goal

by Judy Huntley

Close to ten years ago, CCWC's founders agreed on a goal, which is "the establishment, restoration, maintenance and environmental protection of the Castle Wilderness as a viable wilderness within the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem."

As we all know, the Wilderness is still not established as a protected area, and our efforts to achieve protection have not and must not diminish. Even so, it's time for planning and action for restoration.

### Study and Recommendations

Dave Sheppard, with the help of Gary Parkstrom and Jennifer Taylor, has worked for much of the last year on a comprehensive report and set of recommendations for restoring the Castle. The report is now in draft form and will be available to members and the public shortly. The quotes below are from the draft.

The report "is an overview of the various aspects of restoration that are possible in the Castle and important to the integrity of the Castle Ecosystem, with specific examples where possible. Included are the restoration of the Shell Waterton Field after depletion of its natural gas, of abandoned seismic and logging roads in the Castle, of watershed health, of extirpated and depleted species of wildlife, of habitat effectiveness and connectivity, of old growth forest habitat, of riparian areas, of damaged native grasslands, of aquatic habitats, of fire to the landscape, and of wilderness. Priorities for restoration are suggested."

The authors realize "that some people will consider the report's many recommendations to be hopelessly naïve and unrealistic, if not downright subversive. And some recommendations, if not impossible, will certainly take a long time to achieve. Other recommendations, though, are completely feasible and offer almost immediate improvement if carried out effectively."

The Revised Castle River Sub-Regional Resource Plan (the government's planning document for the area) has, as a basic principle, the preservation of biodiversity. In addition, it makes watershed protection a high priority. The restoration recommendations in the report are consistent with the intent of the IRP and provide operational information about how to implement that intent.

### Getting to Work

Much of what CCWC does is to encourage people in authority to protect and restore the Castle Wilderness. But we have always done what we could on the ground, to both set an example and move protection forward, especially through the stewardship program.

In summer 2002 we will put our volunteers and summer staff to work planning and acting on restoration as well. With Dave's report in hand and some focused funding support, and with the involvement of the regional land managers and outside consultants, we will be planning some hands on projects for this field season.

Last year our field camp was in reaction to what CCWC considered to be seriously inappropriate activity on the part of Shell. This year we get to move to the proactive work of restoration. We have support to do a two year cycle of planning, field work, evaluation, and public education.

CCWC members are strongly encouraged to get involved in any of the activities to begin restoring the Castle. Come out to the AGM or call the office at 627 5059, and together we'll get started!



Victoria Peak

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
SATURDAY, MAY 25, 2002  
SEE NOTICE INSIDE**



CASTLE-CROWN WILDERNESS COALITION

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**CCWC Board of Directors**

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**Staff**

Judy Huntley, CCWC Office Coordinator  
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e-mail: tweedie@telusplanet.net

**Upcoming Meeting**

Our next board meeting will be on the evening of Friday, May 24, preceding the AGM weekend. 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.*

**May is Membership Renewal Month!**

*See the enclosed membership form.*

*Please renew, and please consider making  
a donation if you can.*

**Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition**

**Annual General Meeting**



**Saturday May 25 2002**

**9:30 AM – 4:00 PM**

**Beauvais Lake Group Camp  
(west of Pincher Creek)**



*Southern Alberta Environmental Group members  
are warmly welcome!*

This year's AGM will include workshops to enhance people's abilities to observe and record information useful to stewardship and restoration of the Castle Wilderness, as well as natural history walks around Beauvais Lake Park.

**Schedule**

9:30 Gather and register for sessions  
10:00 Morning hike and workshops  
12:00 Potluck lunch  
1:00 Annual General Meeting  
2:30 Afternoon hike and workshops  
4:00 Wrap-up followed by informal discussions  
and socializing

**Facilities**

The group camp is available for camping (costs covered by CCWC) both Friday and Saturday nights, and has an enclosed kitchen shelter in case of inclement weather. The lake is lovely for canoeing if you want to bring your boat.

**Sunday hike**

As part of CCWC's regular hiking schedule, on Sunday, May 26, Mike Judd will lead a hike on Mt Backus, the low mountain southwest of Beaver Mines overlooking the Castle River. The trail climbs through aspen and mixed pine forest onto open grassy slopes and ridges, with fine views of the South and West Castle drainages and the peaks of the Continental Divide. There are usually plenty of wildlife signs, including possible mating displays by blue grouse. Early spring flowers should be blooming.

For information on the full hiking schedule please check our website, e-mail or phone the office, or refer to the separate brochure included with this issue of the newsletter.



# Stewardship

by James Tweedie

In 1996 the Castle Special Places Committee stated in its report to the Minister of the Environment that “after more than a hundred years of human activities and use, the Castle has maintained its rich plant and wildlife populations in conjunction with man.” This was more a statement of belief than fact. The CCWC recognizes that the Castle is a damaged wilderness and that if positive steps are not taken to reverse contemporary trends, the area will soon lose any claim to wilderness status.

To be a Steward of an area in the Castle requires nothing more than the commitment to care for our rapidly diminishing wild places. No special skills or knowledge are required, and we ask only that you try to visit your chosen area(s) at least once a year and to let the Stewardship coordinator have your observations. Indeed, we would encourage all members to file Stewardship reports for all areas that they may visit, regardless of whether they are formally registered as a Steward.

Since its foundation CCWC has run the Stewardship Program to give our members a structured opportunity to provide feedback on what they see happening in the Castle over time and to have



Murray Anderson



## Up for a Hike?

A separate brochure describing this summer’s hikes is included in this mailing of the *News*. It is also available on the Coalition website. Thanks to James Tweedie and Robert Kershaw for putting it together.

Castle-Crown is considering extending the hiking schedule into the mid-winter season, to offer guided cross-country ski trips in January, February and March. Anyone interested in participating in these should contact the CCWC office.

that feedback conveyed to ALFS, the Land Manager, and to other decision makers involved in the Castle, in the form of our annual *State of the Castle* report. Taking on a Stewardship role for a particular part of the Castle can be both rewarding and heartbreaking: rewarding in the additional enjoyment that comes from some familiarity with a particular place, its trails, and nature’s bounty and variety; heartbreaking, as some stewards have discovered, as “their” particular area is impacted by such landscape transformations as clearcut logging or intensive vehicle use or industrial development.



CCWC

2002 marks the tenth anniversary of the Stewardship Program. Involvement and reporting has fluctuated over the years and we now have only about 20 committed volunteers, in contrast to 30 in 1992. We welcome new Stewards. Your involvement with, and commitment to, some special part of the Castle will help the CCWC maintain its detailed knowledge base of the region and add to the credibility of our ongoing work as the frontline advocacy group for wilderness values in southwest Alberta.

We will be holding Stewardship orientation and workshops at our upcoming AGM at Beauvais Lake, Saturday, May 25th. Please join us.



## Volunteer Opportunities

The CCWC encourages you to consider being:

- ✱ a member of the board of directors
- ✱ a steward
- ✱ a hike leader or hiker
- ✱ a restoration volunteer
- ✱ a regional volunteer coordinator
- ✱ a member of the newsletter committee
- ✱ a promoter of CCWC at regional events

Contact the office (office@ccwc.ab.ca or 403 627 5059) for more details.



# Rare Plants and Other Information Gaps

by Judy Huntley

The Castle Wilderness is generally understood to be, next to Waterton, the place with the greatest biodiversity in Alberta. It stands to reason, with the remarkable range of ecological variation from alpine to broad riparian areas in the main valleys, and with the sweep of the front range canyons plunging from the alpine to the grasslands in the space of a few miles.

We know a little about the large mammals, and less about the birds and small mammals. Amphibians and reptiles are having a hard time everywhere. Are they better off in the relatively natural lands of the Castle? Some studies are being done this summer, and a biologist in the Crowsnest is working to set up a monitoring site.



*After photographing this lady's slipper (listed as "may be at risk" in The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2000) beside a busy hiking trail in Waterton, Murray Anderson returned twenty minutes later to find that the blossom had already been picked. In the Castle Wilderness the lady's slipper still grows in spots where casual flower-gatherers are not likely to pass by.*

Then, as John Hancock reminded us in the last issue, there are the invertebrates. A world of creatures of which most people register little beyond the seasonal changes in the numbers of biting insects.

It has been years since anyone did a significant study of the botanical treasures of the Castle. The Alberta government has gradually been completing status reports on wild species in Alberta. It has completed the mammals, birds, butterflies, fishes, reptiles and amphibians, orchids and ferns. Most of the orchids and ferns are either possibly at risk, sensitive, or lacking the information to make a determination. The other plants are yet to be reported on. The Waterton-Castle area has been identified as a hotspot of biological diversity and likely of rare plants.

Two years ago CCWC sought funding for a two-season survey, but funds were not found. This year we dusted it off, but were too late to find support for this field season. This year Waterton is working to discover the locations of a particular rare plant of high alpine lakes, that is known to be in the park somewhere. If so, it is likely in the Castle as well. The Alberta advisory committee hoped to put researchers in the field here this year, but budget cutbacks are likely to keep that from happening.

## What's to be done?

For one thing, assuming the members and board consider that CCWC should be in the business of information gathering, we need to ensure that an updated version of the rare plants study (originally designed by two of our leading botanists, Reg Ernst and Cheryl Bradley) really does get onto the ground in the summer of 2003.

Second, ensure that CCWC's many volunteer stewards are aware of key habitats so that they can suggest study areas to the botanists.

Third, continue to do all we can to stop the destruction of rare species. All too few of the stands of grand old Engelmann spruce are left, after logging priorities that take out the old growth. The small stand of western cedar that has pioneered into the Castle has already lost some of its branches to passers-by, maybe for Christmas decorations.



*Old growth like these Engelmann spruce is becoming more and more rare because of forest management policy that continually schedules it for logging.*



## For Your Calendar

- May 24 CCWC board meeting (Friday evening)
- May 25 CCWC Annual General Meeting 2002 at Beauvais Lake group camp
- June 1 Crowsnest Stewardship Day; everyone is welcome to take part.
- June 14-16 The Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) Annual General Meeting, near Calgary.

Contact the office for details on these events.



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